THE IMMORTAL NINE

By J. M. STUART-YOUNG

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THE IMMORTAL NINE

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE POETRY OF LAST CENTURY

BY

J. M. STUART-YOUNG.

Author of

"Minor Melodies," "Who Buys My Dreams?" etc.

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INTRODUCTION

The author of these short studies of the poets of the nineteenth century, being permanently stationed in Nigeria, has asked me to correct the proofs, and to write an introduction to them.

I am therefore responsible for any errors of fact or date or diction which they may contain,—I hope there may be no serious oversight in these directions,—and I have made a few small changes in the text where I have felt confident that the author would have approved them on a final reading. But I have been scrupulous not to make any essential difference in the presentation of the poets concerned.

It is almost needless to say that I do not always agree with Mr Stuart-Young's absolute or relative estimates of these poets, either as artists or individuals. It would be difficult to find two minds containing such a ninefold unity. But it is evident on every page that these studies are the sympathetic and discriminating work of one whose own life, whether in England or Africa, under whatever adverse conditions, has been devoted to the pursuit and practice of the art he loves.

Such loyalty is contagious; and I believe that these short sketches will appeal to thousands who have neither time nor inclination for detailed studies of the biographies or prosodic practices of the poets concerned.

The foolish mood that disparaged the work of the great Victorians, and their predecessors, is already passing. The twentieth century is passing also. Its first quarter is past already.

We do well to consider the work of these giants of a past epoch, not in a spirit of criticism or rejection, but asking ourselves frankly what our own century is yet producing which the final verdict of a common posterity is likely to set beside them.

S. Fowler Wright.

PREFACE.

"Can you compose verse?" I asked a literary friend recently. He has achieved reputation as a writer of short stories.

"I cannot . . . And I *don't!*" he answered seriously.

Inside that brief conversation rests the whole argument of poetic accomplishment.

The born poet not only does, but *can!*

Each of the nine British bards, discussed and analysed in the following pages, was a master of his craft. For an ideal treatment of the subject, the number might advantageously have been enlarged to twelve. Matthew Arnold, Edward Fitz-Gerald and Charles Kingsley would then have found inclusion. If, however, the number chosen had been fewer, then Byron, and maybe one or two others, could not reasonably have been admitted. The "immortals" of any century are much rarer than eclectic admirers care to admit!

Nor has the word " Introduction " on our title-page been chosen carelessly. A brief examination of the relative merits of the Mighty Nine is felt to be within the writer's ability. He is content to leave larger and more comprehensive studies to the highly specialized critics of the great poets of whom he writes.

The poets here portrayed—by their work, rather than by their lives—are the few immortals, of a past century, upon whom posterity has placed her laurel crown of choice. They are far enough from our view for us to be *sure* of the permanence of their fame: for, although the student may be in error about his contemporaries, he has generally adequate foundation for belief in " those who have gone before."

When generation after generation continues to absorb the " good tidings " they bequeathed to mankind, the verdict is unassailable. To them has been given the harvest; within the heritage they have left us may be found the fruits; and from those fruits we continue to gather the seed of the thought that is yet to be . . . As the drop of dew in a flower may mirror the sky, so may we see life reflected from the fancies of their brains. . . .

There is a sinister suggestion behind a popular theory of our day: the democratic idea that all men are equal

in the sight of God. Some of us may be tempted not so much to the aspiration, " I can seek to be as intellectually great as Wordsworth, or as lyrically unselfish as Shelley," as to the calming solace of the opiate, " After all, a poet is only a man."

There are critics among us who delight in exaggerating the moral frailties of those who have won enduring fame in art or literature. They will find no support in this volume. Where reminiscence is used, it is meant to be illuminative and not merely " interesting."

But, surely, it is salutary to know that the men who have bequeathed to us so much moral stimulation were not apostates from the faith they preached! They knew the thrills and ecstasies of Love, or they could not have written so finely on the subject. They felt at times the fret and ache of poverty, or they could not ameliorate suffering by their philosophy of patience. They knew the savage thrill of hatred and revenge, or we should not tremble at their fervid rhetoric.

Not only did they watch the eagles of ambition soar aloft, but they shivered away from the venomous hiss of the snake in the grass. The common joys and sorrows of the human race were theirs. And, if they suffered, it was that we might enjoy. If they erred,

we are the richer for their extravagances. They were foolish for our wisdom: they were mad for our sanity.

* * * *

I should like to add that I have not scrupled to use familiar examples of each poet's work, and there may be evidences of a bias toward the lyrical note. For it is only those poems that are simple, sensuous, and sincere that endure through the centuries.

It will be observed by the attentive reader that a slight attempt has been made to link together the lives of the nine poets with whom we are concerned. This is a spiritual, not chronological chain, inasmuch as Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron, Scott, Keats and Coleridge were all born in the latter half of the eighteenth century, and died inside the first forty years of the nineteenth; whereas Tennyson, Browning and Swinburne have passed over within living memory of our generation. It is the *immortal* aspects of their work that have been sought: the thoughts that have been interpreted by poetic genius so that they impress us as deeply and as vividly as though they had originated within us.

THE IMMORTAL NINE.

For the heart that entreats
Time's Gift, without blemish or blot,
In the century past—
From the first to the last—
Nine names, only nine,
O'er the others may shine,—
Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats,
Tennyson, Swinburne,
Coleridge, Browning and Scott!

J.M.S-Y.

I.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.

(1792 - 1822)

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY.
(1792-1822)

The soul, tugging violently at its moorings, in an effort after rhythmical speech, might have achieved a finer stanza than the one which precedes these studies. But it will serve, maybe, to show the platform of thought upon which the writer stands.

A score of years have elapsed since I memorized page after page from these poets: and it should be interesting to judge the respective positions which they now hold in the glorious roll of our Island Singers.

I make bold to insist that the nine poets mentioned—Shelley, Wordsworth, Coleridge, Scott, Byron, Keats, Swinburne, Tennyson, and Browning—rank highest in the nineteenth century, because of the glamour of their melody, the strength of their thought, and the purity of their patriotism. The arrangement of the names may be arbitrary or chronological; but these are the nine who reign in the hearts of verse-loving Britishers throughout the world. No others, though their name be Legion—Clough, Landor, Fitzgerald, Southey,

Trench, Patmore, Houghton—can compare with them for the height or breadth of the imaginations with which they have enriched our literature.

Let us therefore consider their place in relation to poets of earlier centuries, and each to the other. It is the fashion of our day, (as of every other), for young people to declare their revolt from the past. Modern writers of verse suffer from a conceit that makes them regard the last-century poets as *Vieux jeu*. With a contemptuous phrase they go their own way, without pausing to consider whether the old severities of formal construction may not, after all, be better than the licenses with which they would supersede them.

We know that Pope's harmonies are not always perfect, but we may accept his rhymes with confidence as an indication of the pronunciation which obtained in his period. Can as much be said of our contemporary Walter de la Mare? To rhyme " lavender " with " everywhere " is excusable; but who can defend the rhyming of " wreath " with " breath "—

> His garb was grey of lavender,
> About his brows a poppy-wreath
> Burned like dim coals, and everywhere
> The air was sweeter for his breath.

That verse has all of Keats' or Shelley's loveliness—but it is marred by the clumsy rhyming of the second and fourth lines. I do not suggest that such lapses may not be found in the earlier poets. Shelley's rhymes are not always beyond criticism. But the modern poet is too-frequently content with the lower standard of achievement, and the mischief is that the poetry-loving public is being seduced away from the sounder standards. There is a gap between poet and proletariat which was unknown in the time of Charles Mackay. The critics only succeed in widening it when they endeavour to cram down the throats of instinctive beauty-lovers, (and even the poorest and most illiterate working-man may be moved by the lure of beauty), the effusions of the more extravagant section of living singers. They protest continually that the kind of verse for which we have a *natural* liking is " outmoded and obsolete," and that what we *ought* to admire is stuff from which the healthy and natural brain turns away with either contempt or derision.

There are exceptions, of course. Among us to-day are to be found at least a dozen poets, and a smaller number of critics, who are true to the traditions of the past. But the great English-reading public wants what the poets of the younger generation refuse to give:—

at least those poets who are most belauded by the Press as heralding a new dawn,which might be described more accurately as a deeper darkness.

When Shelley was at his finest, he was simple. His lyrics place him on the roll that dates back to Chaucer—

I fear thy kisses, gentle maiden,
Thou needest not fear mine;
My spirit is too deeply laden
Ever to burthen thine.

I fear thy mien, thy tones, thy motion,
Thou needest not fear mine;
Innocent is the heart's devotion
With which I worship thine.

Fashions change with the years, but this is of a quality which is never out-moded.

Shelley, like Byron, was of aristocratic birth. Like Byron, also, he had a beautiful face, crowned with curling hair. Like Byron, he had many strange love-affairs. Like Byron, he outraged the British moralities, and was a rebel against Capital. Like Byron, he did his best work in Italy. Like Byron, he died in the early thirties, and the circumstances of his end were tragic.

Unlike Byron, however, Shelley owed nothing to self-advertisement, or to the caprice of circumstance. Byron wrote deliberately for the applause of Europe, even though his own country might slight him. But Shelley sang as the lark sings—for the song's sake only.

Byron wrote too much: Shelley perhaps too little. But all our poets, with the possible exceptions of Milton and Thomas Gray, published poetry which the world could well afford to lose. That statement is partially true even of Shakespeare. In a measure it is true even of Milton—of Milton, who could set forth a mere string of patronymics:

> Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues,
> Powers:

and make them "sonorous metal, breathing martial sound."

If inferior work can then be found with the signature of such gigantic intellects, there is little wonder that Shelley's lines are occasionally obscure. He wrote too hastily to be always perfect. Yet his defects are never irritating; and his verse-craft, at its best, is flawless.

The desire of the moth for the star,
Of the night for the morrow;
The devotion to something afar
From the sphere of our sorrow.

is perfect craftsmanship, even as it is the sublimest of fancy.

Shelley's father was a conventional country squire, whose mind may never have strayed beyond the sports and recreations of his station. Of his mother we know only that she was very beautiful. There cannot be traced any literary efflorescence in the long garden of his ancestry. A slight, effeminate youth, with dreamily-blue eyes, and tempestuous curls, we see him drawing apart from his school-fellows at Isleworth, where he

wept, I knew not why; until there rose
From the near school-room, voices, that, alas!
Were but one echo from a world of woes—
The harsh and grating strife of tyrants and of foes!

At Eton, in the years of adolescence, he devours Lucretius and Pliny; and prose is used by him for the expression of his dreams, *The Rosicrucian* and *Zastrozzi* dating from this period. Here he has his

first love-affair, also; but it is soon over, and he parts from his cousin, Harriet Grove, without calamity of any kind.

Then comes Oxford, with a real awaking of his creative power. He dreams either to mend a broken world, or to make a new one. The pamphlet which is still so widely quoted by Freethinkers dates from those few months at University College.

The Necessity of Atheism entailed his expulsion from the University; and with him went his co-conspirator, Thomas Jefferson Hogg. But the atheists are wrong in asserting that Shelley denied the Godhead. Every thinker believes what he *wants* to believe. But the poet goes further. He is aware of both himself and the universe. He identifies himself with the burdens of humanity. Shelley shared with our contemporary, William Watson, a vehement scorn of the inadequate and unworthy spiritual view that would make of the Divine Architect of the Universe

Man's Giant Shadow—hailed Divine!

Hence Shelley's poems produce in us a sense of "possibilities"—potential and latent powers in both mind and matter, that make the soul's immortality

credible even to the pessimist. Life becomes natural. For the author of *The Necessity of Atheism* had faith in the healing beauty of Nature; faith in a love that holds Time and Space together; faith in the soul; faith in abnegation and self-sacrifice. This can be atheism only in the vocabulary of a very vulgar mind.

Could an atheist have written *Adonais?* Something other than the negation of faith has been the inspiration of such lines as these,

> He has outsoared the shadow of our night;
> Envy and calumny and hate and pain,
> And that unrest which men miscall delight,
> Can touch him not and torture not again;
> From the contagion of the world's slow stain
> He is secure, and now can never mourn
> A heart grown cold, a head grown grey in vain;
> Nor, when the spirit's self has ceased to burn,
> With sparkless ashes load an unlamented urn.

Shelley was the greatest dynamic force since Milton; and, with all his revolt against organized religion, he stands as an exponent of man's yearning for what is noblest and best in life.

It has been said that one must be an illuminee, deeply

versed in esoteric philosophy, to absorb the rays from so distant a star as that which bodies forth the thought of *Prometheus Unbound*. In that work Shelley is not so much the " ineffectual angel " of Matthew Arnold's definition, as a wilfully-truant spirit, soaring in the empyrean, and almost lost to the ken of common clay. A natural perverseness in the life of this great genius hinders us from understanding his genuine moral predilections—as, for example, we may comprehend those of Byron.

Harriet Westbrook was only sixteen when Shelley eloped with her to Scotland. He was not impelled so much by the " beautiful golden plea " of youth with its attendant " thousand nights of sin," as by a chivalrous desire to save the girl from the persecutions of her family.

The lad of nineteen and the girl of sixteen tied a knot that tragedy of the direst kind was soon to unwind. But *Queen Mab* was written during that delicious honeymoon—and the gain was ours.

Between the tragic episodes in the lives of Shelley and Byron there may be a superficial resemblance, but there is a radical difference.

Shelley remained a boy. Byron was never really a boy, being born into a precocious manhood by reason

of his mother's terrible temper. No-one who has read *Cain* can avoid seeing that Byron was no " natural " revolutionary, as was Shelley. Shelley had been made daringly immoral by his refusal to grow up: he was too clearly intellectual to limit his sins with the fears, the remorse, and the moods of boastfulness, that characterized Byron. So, in breaking society's commandments, Shelley was acting *in harmony with his true nature*. First and last, he was a rebel. When the parting from Harriet Westbrook arrived, we can apportion the blame among four protagonists: Harriet, her sister Eliza, Shelley—and Circumstance.

> On a poet's lips I slept
> Dreaming like a love-adept
> In the sound his breathing kept;
> Nor seeks nor finds he mortal blisses,
> *But feeds on the aerial kisses*
> *Of shapes that haunt thought's wildernesses!*

This " disembodied " search for the beloved is everywhere implicit in Shelley's amorous tendencies.

It is no matter of surprise that within twelve months the young voluptuary was caught within the toils of Mary Godwin.

Harriet was definitely abandoned (with a comfortable allowance); and the poet set up house with his new sweetheart. When Harriet's body was found in the Serpentine, November 1816, (the poet being then only twenty-four), there were many tongues to call him an inhuman fiend, but a fuller knowledge of the circumstances has shown us that they cannot be judged so simply, for poet or peasant, for millionaire or milkman, the greater moralities are based upon the sanctity of the *union* between father and mother; and Shelley, unhappy dreamer, already deprived of his two babies by the Court of Chancery, had now to reap the bitter harvest of his own sowing.

His attitude to life, generous, experimental, and impulsive, was almost certain to end in tragedy to himself or others, but his true character is shown in the evidence of all who knew him. Abstemious and self-denying, impatient of any uncleanly suggestion in thought or action, indefatigable in his effort to ameliorate the sufferings of the poor and afflicted, he had a child-like simplicity and nobility of character and conduct, which may be more naturally contrasted than compared with the more earthly impulses that degraded Byron, both in his life and art.

In his lyric work there is a union of magic with

method, of instrument with player, of art with material, which, to each succeeding generation, gives it an undying charm.

The fountains mingle with the river,
And the rivers with the ocean;
The winds of heaven mix for ever
With a sweet emotion;
Nothing in the world is single;
All things by a law divine
In one another's being mingle;
Why not I with thine?

See the mountains kiss high heaven,
And the waves clasp one another;
No sister flower would be forgiven,
If it disdained its brother;
And the sunlight clasps the earth,
And the moonbeams kiss the sea:
What are all these kissings worth,
If thou kiss not me?

It was on the eighth of July, 1822, that Shelley was last seen alive. The poet and his friend Williams, with a boy, Charles Vivian, started in their sailing-boat

to cross the bay at Lerici. As they set out, the sun was shining in a blue sky. Then they were lost to sight as a mist moved over the water. A sudden tempest rose, and for the twenty minutes that it lasted all hell seemed loose upon the sea. When the air cleared, the boat had disappeared. The bodies were not washed up until ten days had elapsed.

Shelley's heart is now at Boscombe; but the rest of his beautiful young form, after cremation, was scattered to the winds of heaven, on the shores of the bay at Spezzia.

It is significant that a volume of Keats was found in his pocket: "doubled back" says Trelawney, "as if the reader, in the act of reading, had hastily thrust it away."

Shelley must not be read in abstracts. Everything he wrote is worthy of study, although one may need to be familiar with the intricacies of poetic thought to appreciate his longer works. His influence was great —and will remain great. There are few of the best writers who have followed him who have not at some time been touched by the white flame of his search for the beautiful.

II.

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

(1770 - 1850)

WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.
(1770 - 1850)

Of Wordsworth, we know far too many misfires. His lyrics abound in them. But in judging poetry, we should not use the grocer's scales. We should take account only of the best that is offered.

The difference between the work of Wordsworth inspired and Wordsworth uninspired is that between a fragrant floral wreath and the straw-crown of a village idiot.

Most readers will sympathize with the detestation which children feel toward the egregious little cottage girl, who *would* persist in the mathematical absurdity of " We are Seven."

And we might readily sacrifice sheaves of verse written to this butterwoman's jog-to-market measure:

> At the corner of Wood Street, when daylight
> appears,
> Hangs a Thrush that sings loud, it has sung for
> three years;
> Poor Susan has passed by the spot, and has heard
> In the silence of morning the song of the Bird.

Were we to take into serious account everything that Wordsworth wrote, he would be left at the bottom of the list of the Immortal Nine. He is often garrulous, loose-tongued, commonplace, and childish. But consider his range, his variety, his honesty; and the permanent harvest of worth and beauty is worth a million times what we throw away.

Ten of his lyrics and half-a-dozen of his sonnets, had he written nothing beside them, would have ensured him an immortality equal to that of Gray, with that slim volume of *Odes,* and the ever-new *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard,* tucked beneath his arm.

From the first Wordsworthian category, *The Solitary Reaper,* and *I Wandered Lonely as a Cloud,* shine forth independent of time, and place, and fashion. They rank as the highest form of poetry; and what sonnet is there in our language with which this could not claim an assured equality?

The world is too much with us; late and soon,
Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
Little we see in Nature that is ours;
We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!
This Sea that bares her bosom to the moon;
The winds that will be wailing at all hours,

And are upgathered now like sleeping flowers;
For this, for everything, we are out of tune;
It moves us not.—Great God! I'd rather be
A Pagan suckled in a creed outworn;
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn;
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea;
Or hear old Triton blow his wreathèd horn!

Wordsworth met daylight at Cockermouth in Cumberland in April, 1770; being born into the Lake Country that he was to colour so brightly by the aid of his Muse's palette. He is said to have been rebellious and quick-tempered in boyhood, but manhood seems to have brought him a serenity of spirit that maintained to the end. Nature was a trusted friend from earliest infancy—

Ere I had told
Ten birthdays, when among the mountain slopes
Frost, and the breath of frosty wind, had snapped
The last autumnal crocus, 'twas my joy
With stores of springes o'er my shoulder hung,
To range the open heights where woodcocks run
Along the smooth green turf . . .

He was also given to meditation—meditation which led to religious and moral musing rather than action, and which leaves us at times with a sense of disappointed frustration. It may be because he was so wont to mix boyhood recollection with manhood perception—

> . . . unless I now
> Confound my present feelings with the past.

that we so frequently experience this shock of surprise or consternation, and that it is in fragmentary, rather than sustained, expressions of thought that he exercises the most lasting influence.

After being some time at Cambridge, Wordsworth spent a few months in London, and then crossed to France. The Revolution was at its height. That observant young Englishman believed—as so many other young Englishmen have believed about the Bolshevic Russia of our own day—that the Golden Age was at hand. It was exhilarating to be alive amid such scenes!

But it is difficult for us to reconcile the traditional Wordsworth of old age, mooning through the country lanes at Grasmere, with that zealous revolutionary of 1792. His sonnets on Liberty are due to the in-

fluence of France;—and we might almost forgive the massacres of that dreadful autumn because of the spark of fiery joy that was enkindled within his breast. To the French Revolution we owe that urge toward the day when all men shall be equal, free and fraternal!

> We must be free or die, who speak the tongue
> That Shakespeare spoke!

But military despotism followed upon Revolution, even as it threatens to do to-day. Sick at heart, Wordsworth came back to England. To the bosom of Nature he turned. There alone could he find solace and inspiration for the progress of the world . . . Never once, despite his many periods of stammering, was he unfaithful to that decisive choice. He became Nature's Child. Mark how assured is the appeal of this lyrical outburst—

> My heart leaps up when I behold
> A rainbow in the sky;
> So was it when my life began;
> So is it now I am a man;
> So be it when I shall grow old,
> Or let me die!

The Child is father of the Man;
And I would wish my days to be
Bound each by natural piety!

A year after his re-settlement in England, a friend died and left him nine-hundred pounds. By the aid of this slim fortune he was able to give his life to poetry. With his sister Dorothy he moved to Alfoxden (Somerset), and became the neighbour of Coleridge.

There was no stint in Coleridge's admiration of the man who was only two years his senior. "The giant Wordsworth" he called him. Each poet helped the other. But we ought not to forget that Wordsworth owed a tremendous debt to his sister's high spirituality. Readers of this book would do well to examine a clever study by the late Maurice Hewlett. This is part of a volume of essays, called *In a Green Shade*. Dorothy Wordsworth is described as a "crystal vase,"—and it was through that wonderfully clear medium that Wordsworth saw countless beautiful things!

Dorothy was probably the authentic creator of those two fine lines in *The Daffodils*—

They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude.

For this is the way in which Wordsworth's sister originated the poem, and so generously handed the flower of fancy on to her brother for elaboration. The page in question from her diary is dated April 15, 1802-

> When we were in the woods below Gowbarrow Park, we saw a few daffodils close to the water-side. As we went along, there were more, and yet more, and at last, under the boughs of the trees, we saw there was a long belt of them along the shore. I never saw daffodils so beautiful. They grew among the mossy stones about them; some rested their heads on the stones as on a pillow; the rest tossed, and reeled, and danced, and seemed as if they verily danced with the wind, they looked so gay and glancing.

There is an easy prose-music here which is in the same spirit as is the poem which it originated. Perhaps it was owing to the quiet influence of Dorothy that William risked no intrusion from violent emotion, and that his work became so free from the heat of passion?

The Lake District is implicit in his noble lines,—the translucency of the waters, the gossamer-lace of the clouds, the velvety smoothness of the vales, and the rugged strength of the mountains. In his lonely wanderings, Wordsworth encountered all manner of

men and women:—peasants, beggars, gipsies, tinkers and tourists. But it was the shepherd and the cottager who pleased him most, and songs were inspired by these observations and acquaintances which are known to-day wherever our tongue is spoken—

She dwelt among the untrodden ways
Beside the springs of Dove,
A Maid whom there were none to praise
And very few to love:

A violet by the mossy stone
Half-hidden from the eye!
—Fair as a star, when only one
Is shining in the sky.

She lived unknown, and few could know
When Lucy ceased to be;
But she is in her grave, and, oh,
The difference to me!

At thirty-two years of age, Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson. Dorothy's heart was broken by the marriage, for she had been all-in-all to her brother. But the peaceful life in England's fair Lakeland con-

tinued, while Wordsworth poured out his heart in song.

He used Nature as both symbol and key. In all his poems, nevertheless, we feel that Nature is not being used as a background for Humanity, so much as Humanity is being used as driving force on a real stage. Nature is used as a *frame*.

It was Byron who described *The Excursion* as "a drowsy, frowsy poem;" and Jeffrey (in the *Edinburgh Review*) who began his notice with the words, "This will never do!" But the greatness of Wordsworth was already uncontestable. Official recognition made him, at the age of seventy-three, Poet-Laureate. Seven years later he was dead. Heaven embraced his spirit on the anniversary of Shakespeare's birth and death—the 23rd of April.

A fitting epitaph could be found in his own words—

> And now I see with eye serene
> The very pulse of the machine;
> A Being breathing thoughtful breath,
> A Traveller between life and death;
> The reason firm, the temperate will,
> Endurance, foresight, strength, and skill.

At his best, he was the equal of Keats; the more arti-

culate of the two in the Coleridge collaboration; the master of Tennyson; and the partial guide of both Swinburne and Browning. We do him wrong, however, in trying to allot him a numerical place among the Immortal Nine. He stands alone. He was *Wordsworth,*—Nature's Friend and Nature's Confidant!

By his means we share,

> Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears!

and time, which dims so many reputations, only enables us to realize his greatness more.

III.

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE.

(1772 - 1834)

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(1772 - 1834)

Good poets, when they die, go to the threepenny box. Bad poets, before they die, achieve an income that runs into four figures.

Coleridge was the thirteenth child of the vicar of Ottery St. Mary in Devonshire. The number is reputed to be unlucky. Certainly bad fortune dogged Coleridge all his days like an evil shadow.

It was in the threepenny box at a large city bookseller's that I picked up to-day a handsome edition of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. Displayed in the window was Mr. John Masefield's most recent volume, at least fifty brand-new copies of *King Cole*. I had to pay thirty times as much for Masefield as for Coleridge.

Yet I wonder what the unlucky poet, who first saw the light on 21st October, 1772, and who sustained the burden of living for sixty-two years, would have had to say to Mr. Masefield's " peelèd oes "—*peelèd oes* being our living poet's description of potatoes, after their preparation for the cooking-pot?—

Within the cowboy's van the rat-eyed wife,
Her reddish hair in papers twisted close,
Turned wet potatoes round against the knife,
And in the bucket dropped the peelèd oes.

We are tempted to contrast the perfectly balanced opening lines of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*—

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

Coleridge is known to us as a charity-boy at Christ's Hospital. Among his earliest school-fellows was Charles Lamb. The friendship, begun in early adolescence, lasted over fifty years. But learning appealed to the poet of the future in a sombre guise, because

of his lack of holiday-haunts and of country air.

On rainy days of vacation, such scholars as had no friends in London were fain to wander their time away in the streets, waiting dolefully for the school-gates to re-open. Coleridge attempted an escape from this monotony—first by offering himself as apprentice to a shoemaker (his reward being a cuffing from one of the schoolmasters), and next as unskilled assistant in a surgery.

Already, however, metaphysics and theology had gripped his soul with bands of steel. In London thoroughfares he would seek for " folk in sober attire," and would then follow any such quarry for long distances. His hope was that he might draw argument from some chance-encountered philosopher. Also, a now-forgotten poet, William Lisle Bowles, had awakened poetic aspirations in the lad's breast. Furthermore, he had conceived an infatuation for a youthful milliner. We shall not be far wrong if we assume that many of Coleridge's lighter poems date from this period.

Bad luck, however, was to be his lot. Misfortune was still beside him when he reached Jesus College, Cambridge. Ingenuously, he believed that he was to have his rooms furnished by the college authorities.

His indifferent " Just as you please, sir," to the enquirer (a tradesman), who wished to know his commands for alterations, resulted in a debt of nearly a hundred pounds.

Money worries haunted him; and he was also fiercely in sympathy with the French Revolution. Before the end of 1793 he had run away from the university town.

Of his early efforts, the lyric entitled *Names* is worthy of reproduction—

I asked my fair, one happy day,
What I should call her in my lay;
By what sweet name from Rome or Greece—
Lalage, Neaera, Chloris,
Sappho, Lesbia or Doris,
Arethusa or Lucrece.

" Ah!" replied my gentle fair,
" Belovèd, what are names but air?
Choose thou whatever suits the line;
Call me Sappho, call me Chloris,
Call me Lalage or Doris,
Only, only call me Thine!"

It was at school that he began to be called " S.T.C."; and he clung most affectionately to the appellation. Shortly before his death he wrote an epitaph for himself. Therein he used the initials, as though there were no other mortal living who bore them—

Stop, Christian passer-by! Stop, child of God,
And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod
A poet lies, or that which once seem'd he,—
Oh, lift one thought in prayer for S.T.C.;
That he who many a year with toil of breath
Found death in life, may here find life in death!
Mercy for praise—to be forgiven for fame
He asked, and hoped through Christ:
Do thou the same!

Those mournful words " found death in life " are not an unjustifiable exaggeration. He and Robert Southey, the contemporary poet who later succeeded to the Laureateship, enjoyed many wild pranks together. Southey was ultimately to become his brother-in-law. His destined bride, with a limited circle of other enthusiasts, joined Coleridge in subscribing to a Utopian doctrine which they called *Pantisocracy*. With a capital of less than ten pounds they planned the charter-

ing of a ship, which was to take a load of ploughs and harrows, and the tiny community of believers, to a paradise on the banks of the Susquehanna.

Without taking his degree, Coleridge fled the college and began his luckless Odyssey. Pantisocracy ended in thin air, because none of the participants had business faculty enough to organise finance . . .

It is probable that the young poet saw in Sara, his Pantisocratic Bride, the mistress of only one hour,—the maiden who—

> with a dulcimer
> In a vision once I saw:
> It was an Abyssinian maid,
> And on her dulcimer she played,
> Singing of Mount Abora.
> Could I revive within me
> Her symphony and song,
> To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
> That with music loud and long,
> I would build that dome in air . . .

He would, most probably, have been content to wed her in imagination only, but the more practical Southey thought differently . . . So the laggard lover was

hunted from the Angel Tavern at London, and carried off to Bristol. In that town Samuel and Sara were married, October 1795; and six weeks later Southey married Sara's elder sister Edith. The younger sister had the greater of the two poets; but the elder had the more successful! Southey lived to see his *Battle of Blenheim* and *The Waters of Lodore* selling by the hundred thousand copies.

Meanwhile, Coleridge had entered the field of active journalism.

In 1809 he began the issue of *The Watchman*. Failure was almost inevitable. To evade the stamp duty on "regularly-appearing" journals, the paper came out every eighth day, instead of at weekly intervals. One day each week was lost; and the reader of Monday's issue could not expect its successor until the Tuesday of the following week, and the Wednesday of the week after that! A quaint sidelight on legal evasion a century ago!

The earliest circulation of Coleridge's periodical was a thousand. Inside a month this had dropped to close on a hundred; for the most earnest of Coleridge's admirers could not complacently acquiesce in fourpence each eight days for a long-winded article on German metaphysics. With number ten *The Watch-*

man expired peacefully by its own midnight fire.

Coleridge was still under thirty, after all the vicissitudes already outlined. Frustrated cobbler, suppressed surgeon, ill-trained dragoon, egotistical editor and private tutor: these phases of life succeeded one another rapidly. Then at last came his first volume of poems—and his first baby!

The book of poems was a failure—the child grew into an equal failure: for alas! he was the brilliantly-gifted Hartley Coleridge, who allowed intemperance to nullify his irrefutable gifts as a poet. It might be fitting to quote here the son's most famous lyric. It could well have been written by the unhappy father!

She is not fair to outward view
 As many maidens be,
Her loveliness I never knew
 Until she smiled on me:
Oh, then I saw her eye was bright,
A well of love, a spring of light.

But now her looks are coy and cold,
 To mine they ne'er reply,
And yet I cease not to behold
 The love-light in her eye:
Her very frowns are fairer far
Than smiles of other maidens are.

To Coleridge was now to come one gleam of light—the sweet friendship of Dorothy and William Wordsworth. Yet there were distilled into his cup of pleasure the usual bitters. Dorothy was too pure and guileless to see aught strange in her frequent strolls with the friend of her brother. But Sara, Mrs. Coleridge, became nettled; and her lack of sympathy with her husband's poetic afflatus was shown by her gloating over the non-success of *Lyrical Ballads*.

Coleridge and Wordsworth at this time almost identified their work. It is not difficult to trace the thought of Coleridge behind many poems which we ascribe to the elder poet.

Wordsworth was apt to forget that the poet's ideas should be universal concern if they are to be permanent. So infatuated was he with his own local interests, that he babbled. How pleasant, none the less, how full of charm, how eminently natural, is this idea, purely personal as it may have been in its application—

> I've watched you now a full half-hour,
> Self-poised upon this yellow flower;
> And, little butterfly, indeed,
> I know not if you sleep or feed!

Is Coleridge not to be discerned behind this craftmanship? For, by contrast, how ludicrously funny Wordsworth's muse could be, if Wordsworth were left without any mentor at all! We can do nothing but laugh outright at this abstract from a village biography—

> Few months of life has he in store,
> As he to you will tell,
> For still the more he works, the more
> Do his weak ankles swell!

Wordsworth suffered from something more acute than the "literary lapses" of Mr. Stephen Leacock, when he set out to be "natural." In his search for the simple, unadulterated, elementary feelings and passion of the rustic, the poet of Grasmere came to a most fallacious conclusion,—that only among a village community, living simpler and saner lives than town-folk, could true poetry be found.

It was a theory he dropped, when he was inspired in the true way. He forgot that vulgarity is no more confined to cities than politeness is a quality of the countryside. In his best moods he knew—who better? —that there is an incommunicable majesty in "style," and that the language of Milton (for example),

embraced rural as well as urban diction.

As an example, what sweeter or more direct message did Wordsworth ever give than this?—just as simple as that foolish verse about the old man's swollen ankles; but pure, felicitous and musical—

> No nightingale did ever chant
> More welcome notes to weary bands
> Of travellers in some shady haunt,
> Among Arabian sands:
> A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard,
> In spring-time from the cuckoo-bird,
> Breaking the silence of the seas
> Among the farthest Hebrides.

That is the Wordsworth before whom we kneel.

But we must return to our Coleridge, whose career as an author extended over a period of forty years. If the works dated 1797-8, however, were blotted from his writings he would be known only as a critic, a first-class critic, who indulged in rhyming exercises.

It was in this capacity that he most helped and influenced Wordsworth.

The second part of *Christabel* is dated 1801 (when Coleridge was nearing thirty), but it was not published

until much later.

There is no doubt, throughout this long work, that the poet was merely lightening his brain of inventions that had clung, gossamer-like, to it ever since he first began to write in rhythmic periods.

Christabel contains splendidly-invigorating passages. It is said that Shelley fainted when he heard the lines about " the shrunken serpent eyes " of the sorceress Geraldine. But there are many different patterns in its rich mosaic. The poet had discovered a new music and a new manner in such lines as these

> Alas! they had been friends in youth;
> But whispering tongues can poison truth;
> And constancy lives in realms above;
> And life is thorny; and youth is vain:
> And be it wroth with one we love
> Doth work like madness in the brain . . .

But it is by the *Ancient Mariner* that Coleridge will best be remembered. The acknowledged collaboration between Wordsworth and Coleridge was *Lyrical Ballads;* and there were only four pieces by Coleridge to nineteen by Wordsworth. Indubitably, none the less, the gem of the volume is the poem which starts thus:

It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
" By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp'st thou me?"

Which of us has not—like the Wedding Guest, who sat on a stone to hear—" listened like a three years' child " to that wonderful telling of a glorious allegory? To every poetic soul who passes from an eternity of darkness to an eternity of radiance, Coleridge still cries the challenge—

I pass, like night, from land to land;
I have strange power of speech;
That moment that his face I see,
I know the man that must hear me:
To him my tale I teach!

Where, in all our literature, are there such magical pictures?

The Sun came up upon the left,
Out of the sea came he!
And he shone bright, and on the right
Went down into the sea.

The fair breeze blew, the white foam flew,
The furrow streamed off free,
We were the first that ever burst
Into that silent sea.

Who has not journeyed into the sea, where—

All in a hot and copper sky,
The bloody Sun, at noon,
Right up above the mast did stand,
No bigger than the moon;

and who among us has not responded to the parched agony of—

Water, water, everywhere,
And all the boards did shrink;
Water, water, everywhere,
Nor any drop to drink.

The very deep did rot: O Christ,
That ever this should be!
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs
Upon the slimy sea.

Of a truth, nothing more beautiful has been written in all our literature than the breaking of the spell . . .

And yet we who live a hundred years after these marvels of inspiration, are only just beginning to learn the beauties of Coleridge.

The public of his own day would have none of him. Disaster followed disaster. His tragedy *Osorio* lay unacted for ten years. He became a Unitarian minister, and drove his congregations into bored slumber by his wordiness. Then he set out for Germany, with the Wordsworths as companions. He loved the German tongue; and he produced a version of Schiller's *Wallenstein,* so finely wrought that the German author did not scruple to improve his work by incorporating into it the elaborations and interpolations which had been created while Coleridge was making the English translation.

Commercially, none the less, the English *Wallenstein* failed. It seemed as though Coleridge could touch *nothing* but what it turned to dust and ashes! After refusing another offer of a journalistic post—" I could not give up the country, and the lazy reading of old folios "—he settled down in the Lake District.

Health failed, despite the beautiful scenery of Greta Hill, a pretty hamlet near Keswick. Peace had come

too late.

In this scrambled age of kinemas, lotteries, newspapers, aeroplanes, and political warfare, it is difficult for us to snatch even one whole day, as did Coleridge and Wordsworth, to dwell with the grass and the clouds. Still, if we are Nature-lovers, as these Lake Poets would have us be, if we open every sense to her secrets, we may still have the daffodils

> flash upon that inward eye
> Which is the bliss of solitude;

may still attract the eternal verities around us, only slightly hidden behind the veil of things that " seem."

Poor Coleridge! He was tortured by gout and rheumatism, the result of many drenchings when a boy and youth. A quack remedy was offered, which contained a heavy quantum of opium. He contracted the drug habit, and became so weak a slave to the passion that he would consume two quarts of laudanum a week. At his worst, he was known to drink a whole quart in the twenty-four hours.

The story becomes heart-breaking for one who had cried aloud his fervent conviction—

All thoughts, all passions, all delights,
Whatever stirs this mortal frame,
All are but ministers of Love,
And feed his sacred flame!

For a brief time he acted as secretary to the Governor of Malta. Then he drifted to Rome, having broken off all communication with his wife and friends, and leaving his family to subsist on the small pension that still flowed in from the Wedgwoods, of pottery fame. The pension had been conferred upon him in a moment of dire need. His vice still held him fast. He was unable "to react in a normal way to conventional standards"—to use the language of neurology; and it is certain that nothing of value flowed from his pen at this period. To distinguish a mad man from a sane one is not always simple. Hence, to apply any psychological test to Coleridge, as a giant among the irritable race of poets, is absurdly futile.

Every sane man has the same shrinking aversion from the fanatic that impels him to draw away from the deformed. The gesture may be one of either contempt or pity—but it is indubitably one of revulsion. That Nature which abhors the mentally unsound as well as the physically unfit proves her dislike by the chronic

failure in life of the crank and the faddist. "S.T.C." never *once* succeeded.

The earth is made to go round, not by the subtle and incommunicable thoughts of the fool and the overwise, but by the everyday communications of the sensible and commonplace man. The minority may always be right—but the majority keep the wheels going round at normal speed.

Coleridge, therefore, drifted hither and thither, alienating his well-wishers, and becoming, (on his return to England), a hack-writer at a ridiculously low salary. Yet this was he who, according to Thomas De Quincey, was "the largest and most spacious intellect, the subtlest and most comprehensive, that has yet existed among men!"

He lingered on. The last eighteen years of his life were spent with the kindly Dr. Gillman of Highgate. He had submitted himself to a "cure," and did all in his power to break away from the bonds of opium. It was from this haven of retreat that he published *Christabel, Aids to Reflection,* and *Biographia Literaria.*

He had at least recovered his self-respect; and he had the subdued pliability of spirit that allowed him to write school-books in order to earn the necessary

fifty shillings a week for his board and lodging in Dr. Gillman's home . . .

Was not Charles Lamb a trifle malicious in his description—"an archangel—a little damaged!"? Most of us have grown into the easy habit of thinking of Coleridge as a weakling and a failure, from birth to death, without paying due tribute to his courageous fight against long odds. This thirteenth child, this charity-boy, this drug-subject, this poet so great that language stumbled on the threshold of utterance, had not the chances that were afforded to Byron, Shelley, and Tennyson. It was pain and not perversion that drove him to opium. Yet at the last he fought down the vice—and . . . he *won!*

He alone among the poets of a hundred years ago ascended to the very top of the inspirational ladder,—reaching heights that leave us gasping with amazed wonderment. We have to read his verse in the light of his prose. He has left behind him the most profound expositions of poetry ever achieved by an English writer. His tremendous sympathy with Shakespeare postulates a mental brotherhood that gives new depths to our readings of those divine Elizabethan plays.

It was Coleridge who generated what was best in Swinburne. It was Coleridge who lifted the ballad-

form from obscurity, and made possible Rossetti's *Blessed Damozel,* and Oscar Wilde's *Reading Gaol.* And it was Coleridge who wrote—rich heritage for our race!—*The Ancient Mariner*:

> He prayeth best, who loveth best
> All things both great and small;
> For the dear God who loveth us,
> He made and loveth all.

IV.

SIR WALTER SCOTT.

(1771 - 1832)

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(1771 - 1832)

The activities of Scott as a novelist are well-known, wherever the English tongue is spoken. But there would seem to be a lamentable falling-off in his popularity as a poet. This may be due to neglect in the schools, where Scott and Macaulay have given way before the advance of the "Moderns"—Kipling, Newbolt, Noyes, and several others of like quality.

Lockhart's *Life* is sufficiently familiar for us to pass directly to our subject. The poet was born in 1771, and died in 1832. That he wrote his best work under the spur of financial worry needs no emphasis. As recently as August 1922, his brass-bound table-desk was sold at Sotheby's for £32.

The inscription reads,—"This box belonged to Walter Scott, Esq., and contained during their progress to press *The Lay of the Last Minstrel, Marmion* and *The Lady of the Lake*. And it was on this box also that these poems were written. John Ballantyne, Edinburgh, 1812."

Never can I tire of Scott's brave invocation to patriotism in *The Lay of the Last Minstrel.* I have used these sonorous words in all parts of Africa, while lecturing on a variety of subjects. Not once have they failed to rouse my coloured audience to a high pitch of emotional fervour. For that splendid call to love of the soil is universal in its application—

> Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
> Who never to himself hath said,
> " This is my own, my native land!"
> Whose heart hath ne'er within him burned,
> As home his footsteps he hath turned,
> From wandering on a foreign strand!
> If such there breathe, go, mark him well;
> For him no Minstrel raptures swell;
> High though his titles, proud his name,
> Boundless his wealth as wish can claim;
> Despite these titles, power, and pelf,
> The wretch, concentrated all in self,
> Living, shall forfeit fair renown,
> And, doubly dying, shall go down
> To the vile dust, from whence he sprung,
> Unwept, unhonoured, and unsung!

The parochialism, however, of many forms of patriotism is well illustrated by Lockhart, in his *Life of Scott*. He tells us of a minister of the Cumbrays, "two miserable islands in the mouth of the Clyde," who was wont to pray on Sundays for his birthplace, and then add these words: "And in Thy mercy, Lord, forget not the adjacent Islands of Great Britain and Ireland."

Scott's quatrain, (if his it be), at the head of a chapter in *Old Mortality* sufficiently cancels selfishness of that nature—

> Sound, sound the clarion, fill the fife!
> To all the sensual world proclaim,
> One crowded hour of glorious life
> Is worth an age without a name!

He was by nature soldier as well as poet, and he dearly loved the "pluméd troop, the royal banner, the pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war." Even in the well-known lullaby with its quaint Gaelic refrain, the beat is a martial one—

> Oh, hush thee, my babie, thy sire was a knight,
> Thy mother a lady, both lovely and bright;

The woods and the glens, from the towers which
we see,
They all are belonging, dear babie, to thee.
O ho ro, i ri ri, cadul gu lo!

Oh, fear not the bugle, though loudly it blows,
It calls but the warders, that guard thy repose;
Their bows would be bended, their blades would
be red,
Ere the step of a foeman drew near to thy bed.
O ho ro, i ri ri, cadul gu lo!

Oh! hush thee, my babie, the time soon will come
When thy sleep shall be broken by trumpet and
drum;
Then hush thee, my darling, take rest while you
may,
For strife comes with manhood, and waking with
day.
O ho ro, i ri ri, cadul gu lo!

It is objected by those whose own minds are superficial, that his was not of the introspective kind, that he cared only for a full free life, in which the things of the body could be counted as precious as the things

of the mind. A finer insight will observe that he is always, alike in prose or verse, concerned primarily with spiritual issues. It is the poetry of action *in excelsis,* just because it is always pre-occupied with the nobilities of character or conduct from which such actions spring.

In that brave spirit of delight in war and heroic deeds which characterised him, he may appear to be concerned only with the external world of movement, and to give little regard to the internal realm of thought. But as an exponent of *character* and of *action* he reigns supreme. It is the superb pictorial quality, the naturalness and utter spontaneity of his delineations of chivalry, that make his epics stand forth so clearly,—England's parallels to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. They may not, indeed, have the same largeness of subject, but they may claim, instead, a superior finish of execution and, in their dynamic impact, they fall not so far behind the marvellous Greek narratives.

Take his scenery. See how admirably it is sketched, both as a background for the vividly-portrayed action, and as a component part of the spiritual atmosphere desired—

> O Brignall banks are wild and fair,
> And Greta woods are green,

And you may gather garlands there
Would grace a summer-queen.
And as I rode by Dalton-Hall
Beneath the turrets high,
A Maiden on the castle-wall
Was singing merrily:
"O Brignall banks are fresh and fair,
And Greta woods are green;
I'd rather rove with Edmund there
Than reign our English queen!"

Recall, moreover, that vivid description of the Battle of Flodden, which stands unmatched (unless by Scott himself), not only in our own, but in any literature.

When shivered was fair Scotland's spear,
And broken was her shield!

Even here there is the unconquerable courage which was of her own spirit. There is pathos—but it is manly pathos that has nothing mawkish in its bitterness of despair.

In other directions, moreover, we may discover a Shakespearean felicity of expression which is unique of its kind, and which gives an appearance of easy com-

position to the lyrics which are scattered in such rich profusion through epic poems, and prose romances. There are scores of these that spring at once to the mind, and clamour for selection.

The lament of *Rosabelle,* the Hebrew Hymn from *Ivanhoe,* the boat-song in *The Lady of the Lake,* may be too well-known for quotation. Let us take this one at random,

> Soldier rest! thy warfare o'er,
> Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking;
> Dream of battled fields no more,
> Days of danger, nights of waking.
> In our isle's enchanted hall
> Hands unseen thy couch are strewing,
> Fairy strains of music fall,
> Every sense in slumber dewing.
>
> Soldier rest! thy warfare o'er,
> Dream of fighting fields no more:
> Sleep the sleep that knows not breaking,
> Morn of toil, nor night of waking.

Scott, like Wordsworth, was a deep Nature-lover, though there was a significant difference, not one iota of Pantheism colouring the outlook of the Scottish

poet. "If I did not see the heather," he wrote earnestly, "at least once a year, I think I should die!" He loved it for itself alone, not vexing his mind to lift the veil which God has drawn around our human lives, but finding magic enough in the things that are, or that have been. It is in that spirit that many of his most famous passages were conceived,—

> If thou would'st view fair Melrose aright,
> Go visit it by the pale moonlight;
> For the gay beams of lightsome day
> Gild, but to flout, the ruins gray.
> When the broken arches are black in night,
> And each shafted oriel glimmers white;
> When the cold light's uncertain shower
> Streams on the ruined central tower;
> When buttress and buttress alternately,
> Seem framed of ebon and ivory;
> When silver edges the imagery,
> And the scrolls that teach thee to live and die;
> When distant Tweed is heard to rave,
> And the owlet to hoot o'er the dead man's grave,
> Then go—but go alone the while—
> To view St. David's ruined pile;
> And home returning, soothly swear,
> Was never scene so sad and fair!

In breadth of humanity, Scott ranks almost with Shakespeare. It has always been a matter of surprise to the writer (Gaelic by heredity on both sides of the family), that Burns should be esteemed at so comparatively high a value, when Scott is undeniably Scotland's most gifted son.

A cynical writer on Education has recently suggested that Scott increases the number of the schoolboy's acquaintances, without adding to his home-friends. This is not true. Scott created for us a Scotland dearer than that of Burns, because more intelligible to the normal Anglo-Saxon. Lack of the Doric in Scott is no literary blemish. He used the tongue that Shakespeare used for *Hamlet*.

Creation should count for all; and Scott created with a prodigality which was never vouchsafed to the powers of Rabbie Burns. Large-souled, humorous, joyous, benevolent, energetic—what word is there for this great poet, who touched life at such a vast number of points? He put his hand to that

Harp of the North that mouldering long had hung
On the witch-elm that shades St. Fillan's spring

and touched it to such tune as will continue to echo down the centuries until our language ceases in the mouths of men.

V.

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON.

(1788 - 1824)

GEORGE GORDON, LORD BYRON.
(1788 - 1824)

Byron's energetic soul kept him free from the vexatious commonplaces in which Wordsworth so often indulged. It is strange that the writings of one of so wayward a disposition—a wanderer, one might almost say an outcast, from the land of his birth—should yet yield such a golden harvest of fine work. Withal Byron could be equally fond of the ordinary. He was not so inanely vacuous as Wordsworth, at Wordsworth's worst, but he was slovenly to the degree of dereliction of a craftsman's duty toward his public.

The late Professor Churton Collins gave us many curious examples of Byron's methods of utilizing the incidents passing around him, no matter what the work might be that was in course of construction. When writing *Childe Harold* the poet paraphrased into the texture of his verse the actual words of many of his correspondents. The description of the storm, with

the "dying swimmer in his agony," is a translation into rhymed quatrains of a graphic French narrative. For Byron was a fearless plagiarist. He had a tempestuous way of throwing off his thoughts in the rough. Other people's creations became his, by the right of a conquering absorption.

The curious may look up Professor Collins's essay upon Byron, and find there several prose texts, letters from his lady friends, novels he happened to be reading, newspaper cuttings that he culled, as he drifted from town to town on the Continent,—upon which the poet founded his brilliantly-facile rhymes.

The fact that tens of thousands of cultivated men and women throughout Europe (quite apart from America), delight in Byron, while they almost wholly ignore every one of the other eight of our Immortal Nine, may be taken as evidence of a right to fame. Who will deny the vitality and the picturesque beauty of sonorous lines like these—

> Thy shores are empires, changed in all save thee—
> Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?
> Thy waters washed them power while they were free,
> And many a tyrant since; their shores obey
> The stranger, slave or savage; their decay

Has dried up realms to deserts:—not so thou!—
Unchangeable, save to thy wild waves' play,
Time writes no wrinkles on thine azure brow:
Such as creation's dawn beheld, thou rollest now!

Fastidious critics would deny Byron's right to permanence with the accusation that a stanza of the calibre quoted is too "obvious." Well, is not Shakespeare frequently obvious?

The invocation goes on, as stirring as the roll of mighty drums—

Thou glorious mirror, where the Almighty's form
Glasses itself in tempests; in all time—
Calm or convulsed, in breeze, or gale, or storm,
Icing the pole, or in the torrid clime
Dark-heaving—boundless, endless, and sublime—
The image of eternity, the throne
Of the Invisible; even from out thy slime
The monsters of the deep are made; each zone
Obeys thee; thou goest forth, dread, fathomless,
alone.

Only at intervals does the poetry of Byron achieve such rare and high beauty. Not seldom is it false:

neither perfectly true in substance nor perfectly fit in expression. Oftener than we care to confess there is the disfigurement of feebleness, carelessness, haste, contempt of the material under treatment; but, always, the narrative is kept sufficiently alive by its creator's energy and daring.

Two qualities, let us observe, the poet always lacked —he had neither the critical faculty nor the dramatic quality that make movement sequent and coherent. He tossed together the stanzas of *Don Juan* and *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage* day by day, at the dictates of any passing mood. When it is placed on record that he preferred ardently this sort of thing—

> So the struck eagle, stretched upon the plain,
> No more through rolling clouds to soar again,
> Viewed his own feather on the fatal dart,
> And winged the shaft that quivered in his heart,

(a very poor imitation of Pope), to the magnificence of this—

> Last noon beheld them full of lusty life,
> Last eve in Beauty's circle proudly gay,
> The midnight brought the signal-sound of strife,
> The morn the marshalling in arms—the day
> Battle's magnificently stern array!

it will be seen how utterly unreliable was his own literary judgment!

Monologue, indubitably, was his finest instrument. He wore a mask almost incessantly; and his most sustained poems are those in which Byron, the consummate actor, is himself speaking behind one of the hundred-and-one masks he affected.

Marred as are many of his finest passages by looseness of construction, triviality of thought, and even lapses of grammar, his eloquence when acting a part was amazing, and in the poetry of action, which he learnt from Scott, he can equal, at his best, all but Scott's very finest passages. Take these stanzas from *Childe Harold* as examples of the ready flow of his descriptive vein: the breath of the reader comes and goes in sympathy with the beat of the lines—

Ah! then and there was hurrying to and fro,
And gathering tears, and tremblings of distress,
And cheeks all pale, which but an hour ago
Blushed at the praise of their own loveliness;
And there were sudden partings, such as press
The life from out young hearts, and choking sighs
Which ne'er might be repeated; who could guess
If ever more should meet those mutual eyes,

Since upon night so sweet such awful morn could rise?

And there was mounting in hot haste: the steed,
The mustering squadron, and the clattering car,
Went pouring forward with impetuous speed,
And swiftly forming in the ranks of war;
And the deep thunder peal on peal afar;
And near, the beat of the alarming drum
Roused up the soldier ere the Morning Star;
While thronged the citizens with terror dumb,
Or whispering, with white lips,—"The foe! They come! they come!"

Matthew Arnold, speaking as critic, and not as poet, admitted Byron to be the greatest poetic power of his period. But he placed his scholarly finger upon the incurable weakness of the form of verse just quoted. He stated with weighty emphasis that Byron's muse *did not know enough.*

Byron's inspiration indeed has its rise in "feeling," and not in the white heat of "intellect." Goethe came to the same conclusion as Arnold, though in a different way. The German declared in one of his letters, "When Byron reflects, *he is a child!*"

Is this, for example, Byron at his best?—

Man's love is of man's life a thing apart,
'Tis woman's whole existence; man may range
The court, camp, church, the vessel and the mart;
Sword, gown, gain, glory, offer in exchange
Pride, fame, ambition, to fill up his heart,
And few there are whom these cannot estrange;
Men have all these resources, we but one,
To love again, and be again undone.

It is by weight of *Thought* that the greatest poets of the world hold their place,—by the sincerity of their reflections, the strength of their convictions, the wholesome sanity of their philosophy. The creed of Byron —even as the creed of Swinburne—was without a "universal" application, save, mayhap, on the erotic plane. We can no more recommend to mankind the philosophy of George Gordon, Lord Byron, than we can urge acceptance and adoption of Swinburne's view of life.

Were man to adopt such an "unmoral" outlook on Life they would be the worse—certainly, none the better!—of the change. We must always remember to accept Byron for his poetic gifts, and not for his first-hand knowledge of life's more practical aspects.

Sophocles, Dante, Shakespeare, Milton,—ah! there

are excellent rules whereby life might be wisely ordered. But in Byron—here is a defiance of convention which would only lead to chaos!

There is not—and was not—either in his experience of human nature, or in his just and sane reflection upon that experience, any sound basis for such sweeping apostacy from all that is wise and sane and happy as is shown by his wilder fancies.

We can never expect honest and satisfying moral guidance from children and *poseurs*. Byron posed to the day of his death. We may not know, therefore, what another twenty years of life might have brought him in the way of intenser thought. Yet in the stormy strength of his descriptions, and in the perfect delineation of primitive passion, who may stand as his equal? Take these verses as an instance—

> And there lay the steed with his nostrils all wide,
> But through them there rolled not the breath of his pride;
> And the foam of his gasping lay white on the turf,
> And cold as the spray of the rock-beating surf.
>
> And there lay the rider distorted and pale,
> With the dew on his brow, and the rust on his mail:

And the tents were all silent, the banners alone,
The lances unlifted, the trumpet unblown.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in their wail,
And the idols are broke in the temple of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance of the Lord!

Strange results, none the less, follow such intoxicating numbers as these. I have spent a week re-perusing Byron's bulky volumes, and have laid them aside with the gravest doubts . . . For how may I consider him as maker, artist, healer, prophet? Where shall I find an answer to the question, " What is the spiritual signficance of these scores of thousands of rippling rhymes?"

I am almost at a loss. Is it really possible that so great a man, so brilliant an artist, left no *enduring* word of help or consolation for the world which he trod during thirty-six years?

Is *this* the crown of his accomplishment on the moral plane?

Though wit may flash from fluent lips, and mirth
distract the breast,

Through midnight hours that yield no more their former hope of rest;
'Tis but as ivy-leaves around the ruined turret wreathe,
All green and wildly fresh without, but worn and gray beneath!

I have met, superficiality of thought notwithstanding, admirers of Byron in all parts of Africa, and in the Southern Countries of Europe. They carry a pocket edition of *Don Juan* with them, and they read selections at random, with running comments of praise and personal interpretation.

A simple lyric like the following is Byronic in spirit, without being allusively Byronic in structure:

So we'll go no more a-roving
So late into the night,
Though the heart be still as loving,
And the moon be still as bright.

For the sword outwears its sheath,
And the soul wears out the breast,
And the heart must pause to breathe,
And love itself have rest.

Though the night was made for loving,
And the day returns too soon,
Yet we'll go no more a-roving
By the light of the moon.

The unexplainable paradox to the insular and Mrs. Grundy-loving Britisher is that Byron should be esteemed as a " national " poet by both Italy, Spain and Greece. To them he speaks, to their hearts as well as to their imaginations, to the spirits of whole races outside his own country.

There is a reason. By the riotous prodigality of his energy, and by his majestic impressionability, he seems to bring power out of everything he touches. He moves the heart and he inspires the brain as only Genius can. It would be affectation for us to deny the name of poet to a rhymer just because he has flung off an excess of doggerel, which his saner judgment later might have impelled him to burn.

Take the *Ave Maria* in *Don Juan* as an example of his universality. There is an effacement of self, and yet a note of personal conviction, that fills it with mysterious lure:

Ave Maria! Blesséd be the hour!
The time, the clime, the spot, where I so oft

Have felt that moment in its fullest power
 Sink o'er the earth so beautiful and soft,
While swung the deep bell in the distant tower,
 Or the faint dying day-hymn stole aloft,
And not a breath crept through the rosy air,
And yet the forest leaves seemed stirred with prayer.

Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of prayer!
 Ave Maria! 'tis the hour of love!
Ave Maria! may our spirits dare
 Look up to thine and to thy Son's above!
Ave Maria! oh, that face so fair!
 Those downcast eyes beneath the Almighty dove—
What though 'tis but a pictured image strike,
That painting is no idol—'tis too like!

In the palpable historic force with which he appeals to other nations than our own, Byron outshines either Shelley, Keats or Wordsworth. The reputations of his contemporaries were of a strictly English character. Byron's fame has always been world-wide. In his very lifetime he could claim a more enthusiastic following than all his contemporaries put together;—little as the purists might deem that he deserved it!

I have mentioned Swinburne in relation to Byron.

In our time the author of *Tristram of Lyonesse* was fond of reviling the ease with which Byron made the acknowledged European appeal. Should we, however, trust a poet, at least a *great* poet, to judge another great poet? A painter is not the best critic of a picture; nor is a composer the best judge of the score of a rival musician. Poets, like all men with creative brains, have loves and hates that bias judgment . . . They lack the indifference of common folk, because of the intense passion they feel. They have swift and violent reactions, in that they have achieved a personal view of human existence.

That Swinburne had an exquisite sense of *melody* is one of his strongest claims to a high place in the annals of English poetry. And melody was not Byron's strong suit. Therefore Swinburne was, perhaps, the last man in the world to value the impetuosity of Byron at its true worth.

Our age has been too prone to value the grace and the melody of language, with little or no care for the thought, the passion, and the vision that lie behind the words. I should be reluctant to assert that Byron was at his best when "jingling" in the way that Swinburne's brilliant craftsmanship made peculiarly his own sphere of success. Take this as an example

of Byron in that happy mood:

There's not a joy the world can give like that it takes away,
When the glow of early thought declines in feeling's dull decay;
'Tis not on youth's smooth cheek the blush alone, which fades so fast,
But the tender bloom of heart is gone, ere youth itself is past.

Then the few whose spirits float above the wreck of happiness
Are driven o'er the shoals of guilt or ocean of excess:
The magnet of their course is gone, or only points in vain
The shore to which their shivered sail shall never stretch again.

It would be the sign of pedantic affectation, then, if we assumed Swinburne to be the greater poet than Byron just because we *know* that he could have handled the theme of those two stanzas with a more appealing sense of musical values than his predecessor. We need to go back to Beaumont to find the ripple of music

and the authentic note of the born poet on such a subject:

> Like to the falling of a star,
> Or as the flights of eagles are,
> Or like the fresh Spring's gaudy hue,
> Or silver drops of morning dew,
> Or like the wind that chafes the flood,
> Or bubbles which on water stood:
> E'en such is man, whose borrowed light
> Is straight called in and paid at night,—
> The wind blows out, the bubble dies;
> The Spring entombed in Autumn lies;
> The dew's dried up, the star is not—
> The flight is past—and man forgot!

We may safely leave Byron's fame to his admirers outside Britain, if we have doubts of his moral constancy among ourselves. The Alps, the Apennines, Rome, Venice, Athens, the Atlantic and the Aegean—where need we place the bounds of his remarkable influence?

A century has passed, and the Italians and the Greeks still worship their Byron. A manifold humanity, common to men of all nations, makes us a family . . Let us give Byron the benefit of the doubt. . Whatever

the tongue of the reader, there is an urge in *The Isles of Greece* that stirs the blood like a clarion call:

> The mountains look on Marathon—
> And Marathon looks on the sea;
> And musing there an hour alone,
> I dreamed that Greece might still be free;
> For standing on the Persians' grave
> I could not deem myself a slave.
>
> * * * *
>
> Fill high the bowl with Samian wine!
> Our virgins dance beneath the shade—
> I see their glorious black eyes shine;
> But gazing on each glowing maid,
> My own the burning tear-drop laves,
> To think such breasts must suckle slaves!

The voice here is unmistakably sincere. It is such that we realize anew how weak and tawdry must be esteemed most of his earlier hysteria. On the 19th of April 1824 he died—aged only thirty-six, but with his soul written out . . .

Surely we may, no matter with what qualifications, allot to him also a niche in the Gallery of the Nine Immortals.

VI.

JOHN KEATS.

(1795 - 1821)

JOHN KEATS.
(1795 - 1821)

Since Pope's dictum that " poetry is the affair of idle men who write in their closets, and of idle men who read there," the reading public, in relation to verse, has substantially increased.

Yet it remains, this art of rhyming, the affair of a comparatively small class, the leisured and the cultured minority of an intensely materialistic age. The preference for ephemeral literature—fiction of the lighter romantic kind, chatty biography, or easily assimilated (and quite as easily forgotten !) popular knowledge—is even more pronounced than it was at the end of last century. The trail of the newspaper press is over everything artistic . . .

" Of what *use* is poetry?" asks our utilitarian age. " Show us that it is not only pleasant, but *advantageous* to human existance !"

Well, this study of Keats will attempt such a demon-

stration. Confidence should arise when it is stated that into the poetry of this one of the Nine Immortals there entered the wisest opinions of as wise a mind—even including those of statesmen!—as the period of a hundred years ago could show.

For poetry may lead us to frame for ourselves a just and sane philosophy of life. It creates the moods that it interprets—and moods may be very precious things.

It was when *Blackwood's Magazine* had just made that egregious error of judgment which is not forgotten even a hundred years later, telling "Johnny Keats" to go back to his shop, and to "stick to plaisters, pills and ointment boxes," that he wrote confidently to his publishers, "I think that I shall be among the English poets."

Son of a stableman, cockney to the bone, and only crudely educated—who can marvel that John Keats half-despaired of his handicap, especially when consumption had laid its bony hands upon his shoulders? Yet that apothecary's assistant lived in a world of antique mystery and passionate emotion that was essentially Hellenic. He was soul-mate of two great contemporaries. Socially they might be miles apart. Yet all three were Greek. Keats was Hellenic, even

as aristocratic Byron, even as sensitive and cultured Shelley!

With a difference . . . The cockney note sometimes intruded, and it was that note which kept Keats purely and permanently English.

How pitiful that he died so soon! At twenty-five Shakespeare had not penned one serious line; while at twenty-five John Keats was obliged to put the pen aside for ever. Keats is immortal, albeit he never had the time to bring to ripeness his matchless gifts. I have often thought that the verses of *Sorrow* epitomize his own forebodings of an early death—

O Sorrow,
Why dost borrow
The natural hue of health, from vermeil lips?—
To give maiden blushes
To the white rose bushes?
Or is't thy dewy hand the daisy tips?

O Sorrow,
Why dost borrow
The mellow ditties from a mourning tongue?—
To give at evening pale
Unto the nightingale,
That thou mayst listen the cold dews among?

Into the cloudland of melodious ambiguity which lent a dubious distinction to Shelley, or into the slough of vulgarity which so often snared the feet of Byron, Keats rarely entered. He was above all things *lucid*. His language is always felicitous,—yet it is never transcendental. Nor can those earlier boyish efforts, which are still being unearthed and issued to the public as examples of his "cockneyism," make him genuinely commonplace, as Wordsworth frequently became commonplace.

We might claim for Keats that he shares with Shakespeare the high privilege of never writing without inspiration. If he cloys, it is the result of his attachment to beauty:

O soft embalmer of the still midnight,
Shutting, with careful fingers and benign,
Our gloom-pleased eyes, embowered from the light,
Enshaded in forgetfulness divine:

O soothest Sleep! if so it please thee, close
In midst of this thine hymn my willing eyes,
Or wait the Amen ere thy poppy throws
Around my bed its lulling charities.

That Keats's best work is so high as to be on a par with Milton's may in many quarters be denied. Yet he ranks above Wordsworth when he is most truly in harmony with his own soul; and he is a surer craftsman than Shelley. The *Ode to Autumn* and *Ode on a Grecian Urn* are better than anything to be found in all the hundred thousand lines of Byron's epics. The time is past for either ephemeral adulation or transient censure. We can only know and acknowledge that Keats has added to our tongue fragments of intricate and exquisite design that will last as long as the English language:

> " Beauty is truth, truth beauty "—that is all
> Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know!

With all his conceit in the worth of his thoughts, that consumptive lad, so unmercifully slated by unimaginative critics, gave us always of the artistic best that was in him, and though we know that, were we to sacrifice one half of all he wrote, we should still have a golden harvest, we should still be reluctant to lose a single line, which is more than can be said for Wordsworth or Byron. He wrote not only with a conscious artistic ideal which rendered slovenly work impossible, but

with an assurance of his own ability, however it might be frustrated by the physical weakness which constrained him,—

When I have fears that I may cease to be
Before my pen has gleaned my teeming brain,
Before high-piléd books, in charactery,
Hold like rich garners the full-ripened grain;
When I behold, upon the night's starred face,
Huge cloudy symbols of a high romance,
And think that I may never live to trace
Their shadows, with the mighty hand of chance;
And when I feel, fair creature of an hour,
That I shall never look upon thee more,
Never have relish in the faery power
Of unreflecting love,—then on the shore
Of the wide world I stand alone, and think,
Till love and fame to nothingness do sink!

The true lover of poetry finds in the *Ode to a Nightingale* a polish of form at least equal to the best that is to be discovered in Shelley, and far superior to anything of Byron's. We have to allow in many instances for revisions of the text of the younger poet, because of

the chaotic condition in which his manuscripts were left. But there is a silence, seemingly bred of wonder and reverence, in the closing verse of the longer of the two odes, cited a moment ago, that brings a thrill to our every nerve:

Forlorn! the very word is like a bell
To toll me back from thee to my sole self!
Adieu! the fancy cannot cheat so well
As she is famed to do, deceiving elf.
Adieu! adieu! thy plaintive anthem fades
Past the near meadows, over the still stream,
Up the hill-side; and now 'tis buried deep
In the next valley-glades:
Was it a vision, or a waking dream?
Fled is that music:—do I wake or sleep?

It is probably true that there is in Keats a great deal that is over-subtle, over-beautiful, ultra-ornate, for the appreciation of more ordinary minds; and maybe the hidden spiritual meaning of *La Belle Dame Sans Merci* will ever remain the boasted preserve of the cultured few . . . For Keats had little of Byron's human and social enthusiasms. His passion for Fanny Brawne alone coloured his creative life. His muse was not,

like Byron's, a bee that sucked from a hundred flowers, and revelled in amatory conquests. But Keats was a consummate master of that one string on his lute: the adoration he felt for the one woman of his soul's destiny.

Like that of Shelley, the life of Keats was a series of impulses and caprices. But how steadfastly burned the flame of his love for Fanny! Is not this a charming love-letter?—

> Sweetest Fanny,—
>
> You fear sometimes I do not love you so much as you wish. My dear girl, I love you ever and ever, and without reserve. The more I have known, the more I have loved. In every way—even my jealousies have been agonies of love, in the hottest fit I ever had I would have died for you. I have vexed you too much. But for Love! Can I help it? You are always new. The last of your kisses was ever the sweetest; the last smile the brightest; the last movement the gracefullest. When you passed my window home yesterday, I was filled with so much admiration as if I had seen you for the first time . . . Even if you did not love me, I could not help an entire devotion to you; how much more deeply, then, must I feel for you, knowing you love me.

Carlyle once said of De Quincey that it was a miserable thing for a man to make a reputation out of

his vices, especially a literary reputation. This is what Byron did. This is what Keats would never have done. His soul was too pure—for this stood as his creed:

"I find that I cannot exist without poetry—without eternal poetry—half the day will not do—the whole of it!"

Think of that dying poet—not yet twenty-six! When the arterial blood showed itself upon his handkerchief, and there remained to him only three weeks of life, he penned the saddest letter known to the annals of English literature—

> I can bear to die—I cannot bear to leave her . . . Oh God, God, God! Everything I have in my trunks that reminds me of her goes through me like a spear. The silk lining she put in my travelling cap scalds my head. My imagination is horribly vivid about her—I see her—I hear her . . . Oh, I have coals of fire in my breast! It surprises me that the human heart is capable of so much misery!

He died at Rome on the 23rd of February, 1821; and his name—not "writ in water"—shines radiantly in human tears, tears that are more enduring than bronze.

VII.

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.

(1837 - 1909)

ALGERNON CHARLES SWINBURNE.
(1837 - 1909)

Swinburne died so recently that we may revive the epigram about "recollections"—either they are written by people who have lost their memory, or by folk who have done nothing worth remembering. One, at least, of the writer's dearest and most vivid reminiscences is of the interview accorded him, when home on a brief leave from the tropics in 1905, by that great " five-foot-five " poet, who resided at The Pines, Putney, London for so many years, under the loving protection of Theodore Watts-Dunton.

From early youth I had admired the work of Swinburne, both in prose and verse; and to greet in the flesh the creator of *Atalanta in Calydon* was a romantic adventure, besides being a literary stimulant.

I shall never forget that wonderful luncheon hour. There was something elfin and gnome-like in the personality of Algernon Charles Swinburne,—something that in moments of irritable excitability repelled and alarmed, but could glow into a flame of

godlike splendour when his mood was exalted to praise of those Elizabethan *geniuses* whom he emulated.

As we sat at table together, a party of four, I remember that I quoted a new poem by Alice Meynell. In his rather thin voice, hysterically threatening to crack on the high notes, he began to recite her sonnet, "Renouncement"—one of the noblest poems in our language. Almost instantly the voice sounded flute-like in the earnestness of its delivery; and I listened entranced,—

I must not think of thee; and, tired yet strong,
I shun the thought that lurks in all delight—
The thought of thee—and in the blue Heaven's height,
And in the sweetest passage of a song.
Oh, just beyond the fairest thoughts that throng
This breast, the thought of thee waits hidden yet bright;
But it must never, never come in sight;
I must stop short of thee the whole day long.
But when sleep comes to close each difficult day,
When night gives pause to the long watch I keep,
And all my bonds I needs must loose apart,
Must doff my will as raiment laid away,—

With the first dream that comes with the first sleep
I run, I run, I am gathered to thy heart!

He paused abruptly on the threshold of a further recitation, with his thin shoulders jerked backward, and an admonitory finger upraised.

"You are not eating your lunch," he said to me gravely. Nor would he go on with his quotation until I resumed the knife and fork that I had laid aside to listen. What need, to-day, to animadvert upon what was weak in his nature?—his early addiction to alcohol, his *penchant* for dangerous friendships and his outbursts of temper, when we remember that miraculous weaning by the Watts-Dunton household? We may disagree, if we will, with the visions of life which he shows us, but we cannot deny the splendid craftsmanship of every line he has left behind him!

As a poet, he may have been overlauded by harmony-lovers, intoxicated by the metrical audacities of his earlier lyrics, but his place is secure among the Nine Immortals, if only for the deeper note which pulses from the works of his later years. It is a problem yet to be solved by posterity, which of his several intellectual phases will survive. Most of his admirers plump for his earlier work, I for his later.

When the newspaper press was so avid, at the time of his death, to rake over the rubble of the great poet's youthful follies, it was a matter of supreme satisfaction to me—over four thousand miles away!—to know that dozens of his trusted friends were rallying loyally to his vindication . . .

We have here to consider Algernon Charles Swinburne as a poet,and not as a philosopher. For let it be frankly admitted that the creator of *Songs before Sunrise* was no high optimist as was Tennyson, no balanced moralist as was Browning, and not so wholesome a reconciler of God to Man and Man to Life as was Scott . . .

He sang gloriously. But, oftener than not, the keynote was a distinctly minor one; and Time alone may rank Swinburne justly,—Swinburne who has four times as many books to his name as any other of his numerous contemporaries!

With all his limitations, he was probably the most perfect craftsman since Spenser. But sanely human, in deadly earnest, kindly, sincere, self-abnegating? We must analyze a little before we dare answer in the affirmative!

Listen to this quatrain, and observe the pessimism behind the sonorous music, a pessimism that sheer

verbal beauty almost hides!

He weaves, and is clothed in derision,
Sows, and he shall not reap,
His life is a watch or a vision
Between a sleep and a sleep!

In the early 'thirties Swinburne confessed to this zeal for artistry *alone* in the words, "I only write poetry to escape from boredom!" From boredom? Not thus is high Olympus scaled, and not thus do the gods suffer invasion of their sacred territory! And yet, and yet, how we love it . . .

Swinburne was born in London on the 5th of April, 1837. He was the eldest of six children. His babyhood was spent in the country, sometimes in the Isle of Wight with his parents, but oftener in Northumberland. His grandfather had his home near the Scottish border, and the impressionable boy grew to love the rugged scenery of the north.

His health was somewhat delicate, yet he had that pertinacity of spirit which will not suffer breakdown. At twelve, he was sent to Eton. He did not play any games. As compensation he became attached to the sea quite early in life, and was soon an expert

swimmer. Moreover he was an untiring walker, absolutely unflagging in the determination to derive every ounce of available benefit from the movement of his limbs. And—significant trifle!—his hat was the largest known to the whole school!

He wrote . . . But we cannot show his youthful work; inasmuch as he proudly declared, after the success of his earliest volume, that he had destroyed " root and branch " everything penned before he was sent to Oxford. Greek influence was paramount. The cry of Swinburne was ever, " I praise the gods for Athens!" In even this early fragment the Hellenic note rings clear,—

The winds, that fold around
Her soft enchanted ground
The wings of music, sadden into song;
The holy stars await
Some dawn of glimmering fate
In silence—but the time of pain is long,
But here no comfort stills
The sorrow that o'erclouds the purple hills!

Contemporaries of his school-days tell us that he was known as " mad " Swinburne; and we can glimpse

in imagination the peculiar jerkiness of his gestures, the fluttering of his delicately-small hands, the strange slope of his shoulders, and the crimson disorder of his aureole of hair. He devoured literature in five languages, and had a marvellous memory.

The richness of metaphor and epithet that was soon to mark his poetic work is illustrated by an anecdote of his early manhood. He was under the impression that cabmen had only two fares,—a shilling for a short drive, and eighteen pence for a longer one.

He had been out with William Morris. The cabman considered himself underpaid by the modest shilling handed over by Swinburne. He began to abuse his fare. The poet retorted on the Jehu's curses with such a wild torrent of gaudy vituperation that the man sat as if paralysed for a moment. Then he whipped up his horse, and clattered down the roadway as if all the fiends of hell were at his back . . .

Alas! that period of joyous and dazzling *insouciance* was soon to change to tragedy of a complex kind. Swinburne described, in these rhythmic numbers, the sweets of his virile young manhood,—

The morning song beneath the stars that fled
With twilight through the moonless mountain air,

While Youth with burning lips and wreathing hair,
Sang towards the sun that was to crown his head,
Rising; the hopes that triumphed and fell dead;
The sweet swift eyes and songs of hours that were;—
These may'st thou not give back for ever; these
As at the sea's heart all her wrecks lie waste,
Lie deeper than the sea;
But flowers thou may'st, and winds, and hours of ease,
And all its April to the world thou may'st
Give back, and half my April back to me!

"Half my April!" Springtime was the birthright of Swinburne,—for, despite all his sufferings, he never grew old! He died a boy at heart, even as he died a youth in body!

Howbeit, in the very April of his happy life, he could not restrain the paganism of his outlook on moral problems. With a frankness that is natural only in one who was able to live his spiritual existence apart from the race, he revealed to the world his innermost feelings in these fine stanzas—

I shall go my ways, tread out my measure,
Fill the days of my daily breath
With fugitive things not good to treasure,

Do as the world doth, say as it saith;
But if we had loved each other—O sweet,
Had you felt, lying under the palms of your feet,
The heart of my heart, beating harder for pleasure
To feel you tread it to dust and death—

Ah, had I not taken my life up and given
All that life gives and the years let go,
The wine and the honey, the balm and leaven,
The dreams reared high and the hopes brought low?
Come life, come death, not a word be said;
Should I lose you living, and vex you dead?
I shall never tell you on earth; and in heaven
If I cry to you then, will you hear or know?

This terrible heart-cry resulted from a poignant memory of the one and only woman whom he asked to share with him " the wine and leaven of lovely life." She was a gracious and sparkling member of the family of the renowned pathologist John Simon. This girl accepted Swinburne's gifts of roses, and listened to his impassioned quotations from Marlowe and the other Elizabethans of his eager college studies. But she laughed in his face when he offered her marriage,

laughed lightly, and then escaped from his hungry arms.

The poet was humiliated and outraged at one and the same time. Henceforth he regarded Woman in the abstract with mingled chagrin, repulsion and desire. That episode of his college days may be regarded as the keynote of later "adventures" with several notorious women of the time.

Let us except one incident. Dante Gabriel Rossetti's girl-wife and Swinburne were so alike in physical characteristics that they might have passed for brother and sister. Lizzie Siddell seems to have been a singularly impulsive girl; and we ought not to condemn the platonics that obtained in Rossetti's household, playful, restless, excitable and absurdly innocent as they were.

Tragedy intervened; for Lizzie Rossetti committed suicide. What painful memories lay behind that overdose of laudanum is hidden from our knowledge. No newspaper reported Swinburne's first-hand evidence; and his several biographers have skated skilfully over the thin ice of this pitiful episode in 1862. All we know is that Rossetti and Swinburne remained close friends, and that Swinburne was present when Rossetti thrust into his wife's coffin the sole manuscript

of his poems . . .

It will be remembered that the Home Office, in 1869, ordered the abstraction of the precious wad of paper. We have hence not been the losers by Rossetti's quixotic act of dedication to the fragrant memory of his young and gentle wife.

Reading over *Poems and Ballads* to-day, and remembering that it was published nearly sixty years ago, I had little difficulty in reconstructing the horror and indignation on the one side, and the jubilation and wild enthusiasm on the other, that hailed the book's appearance.

Much water has flowed beneath Westminster Arches since the 'sixties of last century. At that remote period, poets were almost compelled to be " time-servers." It was the middle of the Victorian reign; and it stood as the most sedate, the most quiescent, and (maybe) the least efficient period in the history of verse.

Browning, rebuffed and rejected, but patiently biding his hour, was concentrating his genius on that marvellous piece of philosophic reasoning *The Ring and the Book*. Tennyson reigned imperially, friend of his sovereign, and mechanically carved out his *Idylls*. Matthew Arnold, with a portfolio full of fine verses, continued to address the public in polished

prose. Aubrey de Vere and Lord Lytton were typical rhymers of the period.

Swinburne therefore had chosen his hour with uncanny insight. A modicum of good work undoubtedly *did* appear from time to time—but the breath of a new awakening was needed; and here stood the flame-haired Hellenist, utterly in revolt against convention, and fully determined to *épater la bourgeoisie!*

He threw a bombshell. Then he stood back to laugh at the result.

> Leaves pallid and sombre and ruddy,
> Dead fruits of the fugitive years;
> Some stained as with wine and made bloody,
> And some as with tears!

To-day the whole business of accusation and retort, argument and refutation appears ridiculous—for we have among us *soi-disant* poets who throw the word "bloody" about, as though it were a blessing in disguise!

Where so much has been said already in praise or denunciation of his earlier volumes, it may be best, in this brief notice, to direct attention rather to the fine work of his maturer years.

The magnificent rhetoric of the *Armada,* the beauty and passion of *Tristram of Lyonesse,* with its incomparable prelude which touches the highest pinnacle of English song, with other great poems on very various topics, were yet to come, as were the patriotic poems,—poems of a patriotism no less deep and vital because it was not of the vehement and cornet-blowing sort made familiar by other poets of the period. In *A Watch in the Night* he depicts England's apathy, her sluggish absorption in local politics, even while the " bounds of Empire " were waiting upon her gesture; and he cried to her in an agony—

> England, what of the night?
> Night is for slumber and sleep,
> Warm, no season to weep!
> Let me alone till the day!
> Sleep would I still if I might,
> Who have slept for two hundred years;
> Once I had honour, they say—
> But slumber is sweeter than tears!

England's vindication was not made until after Swinburne's death; but we may believe, no matter how great a crime against progress the Great War made,

that the pregnant years that followed upon the fourth of August, 1914, washed away from our Homeland the stain that Swinburne depicted—

Slumber is sweeter than tears!

Then there are the plays, which would be sufficient alone to be the foundation of a great reputation.

Mary Stuart is the sort of book to browse over for any number of winter nights: it incarnates the spirit of romance, and brings to a drab world the colour and harmony of three hundred years ago.

The Tragedies are wonderful, and almost justify Swinburne's disciples in claiming for him the title of " the greatest of the Victorians." Unfortunately, they are not suitable, as they were not meant, for acting. Yet here between the slim covers is the fire of Love, the spear-thrust of Adventure, the salt and the savour of Life lived at its fastest pace:—every swiftly-moving and penetrating thing known to our day-dreams!

It is significant of Swinburne's real personality that he held a singularly high opinion of woman in the abstract,—and he literally adored babies. It was always to me delightful to know that the creator of *Iseult's Prayer* took his way from Putney to the

Common and back every morning, seeking avidly for chubby little ladies in perambulators! Youth goes. But Swinburne was indeed one of those "whom the gods loved"—for he remained to the end a boy—a golden boy with a crown upon his head, but with no throne on which to sit.

Had he died at thirty, he would have left behind him exactly the same impression of swiftness and vitality that abides in the hearts of his admirers to-day—this legendary creature, this Prince of Song, with unshrinkable ardour and indomitable power.

Glorious Swinburne!—always rising from reason to rhapsody, ever refusing to know of anything vile or common or unclean or repulsive!

We may close our study of his work with stanzas that are as noble as anything he ever wrote. The position of Algernon Charles Swinburne may safely be left to the verdict of posterity, while such examples of his work remain—

A little time we gain from time
To set our seasons in some chime,
 For harsh or sweet or long or low;
 With seasons played out long ago,
And souls that in their true unprime

Took part with summer or with snow,
Lived abject lives out or sublime,
And had their choice of seed to sow
For service or disservice done
To those days dead and this their son.

A little time that we may fill
Or with such good works or such ill
As loose the bonds or make them strong
Wherein all manhood suffers wrong.
By rose-hung river and light-foot rill
There are who rest not; who think long
Till they discern as from a hill
At the sun's hour of morning-song,
Known of souls only and those souls free,
The sacred spaces of the sea!

VIII.

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON.

(1809 - 1892)

ALFRED, LORD TENNYSON.
(1809 - 1892)

In the verse of Tennyson are to be found the climbing mists of rose and amethyst, the starry heights, and the translucent skies of Romance. He enriched, beyond the mede of mere opinion, English poetry. Yet, by a strange paradox, he impoverished it. In the Day of Judgment, we are told, offences of a minor kind will be forgiven the *dilettante* for the sake of his consistent aim after beauty. Thus a long life of decorous virtue, such as that lived by the grand old man of poetry, might seem to disavow its justification.

Tennyson enriched our language with many beautiful works. He impoverished it by pre-occupying the public with his word-mosaics to such a large extent that Browning, (as one example), was neglected. Countless men of poetic genius throughout Victoria's reign languished under the shadow cast by Tennyson's personality, and perished from lack of sun and air.

To many ears this may sound like rank heresy. To many other thoughtful readers the polished placidity of Tennyson's sixty thousand lines has never appeared more than pretty-pretty. Yet Tennyson was a past-master of form,—in the lyric, the drama, the ballad, and in the recitative of heroic hexameters. And noble imagination rises continually superior to the vesture in which it is attired

> Ah, sad and strange, as in dark summer dawns
> The earliest pipe of half-awakened birds
> To dying ears, when unto dying eyes
> The casement slowly grows a glimmering square;
> So sad, so strange, the days that are no more.

Yet are we fain to confess that Tennyson attached far too much importance to the vehicle, and far too little value to the impulse that moved the vehicle forward to its appointed goal . . .

The Victorian Laureate was warmly attached to his Monarch. Queen Victoria, truth to tell, " coddled " him. Hence his personality was not so much imposed upon his period, as the period became imposed upon his personality. Of all the Nine Immortals under review, Tennyson alone bears the " upholstery " stamp

of the age in which he laboured. "Antimacassar" veils more than half of his work. A fine craftsman, he lacked the profundity of his contemporary Browning. Could Browning but have borrowed Tennyson's tools, or could Tennyson only have absorbed the rugged earnestness of his rival, we might have had a second Shakespeare!

Busy people in the mid-nineteenth century had a comfortable feeling that the Poet Laureate was the right man in the right place. He plied them with so many "beautiful" volumes that they had no time to spare for more youthful aspirants after bardic honours. Tennyson's idealism was "so very restful, so comforting, so—so *reassuring,* dearest!" He had none of the tumult and rebellion of Shelley and Byron —and his life was free from scandal. Nor was he a voluptuous revolutionary like that dreadful Swinburne.

Tennyson, in fact, was the poet of prosperity—of law and order—of an England that was just emerging into commercial affluence and power!

Another thoroughly admirable feature about the Laureate was his accuracy. He would never consent to faulty observation being made permanent . . . Hence each new edition of his poems saw revisions

and emendations, even if the word altered stood merely as an adjective.

How different from poets who—like Swinburne—are alleged to sacrifice even truth to alliterative beauty! Hugh McCulloch once wrote a poem, the last line in every stanza of which ran thus—

And in the west the waning moon hangs low.

Now the waning moon does not appear in the west at all; and the publisher changed the word " waning " to " weary."

McCulloch wrote angrily to his mentor, and declared that he was a poet and not an astronomer—he would place the moon just wherever he pleased! Tennyson, however, had mysteriously correct knowledge, attributable only to his faculty of keen observation. Witness the autumnal effect of these lines, and the strength of every " inevitable epithet "—

Our birches yellowing, and from each
The light leaf falling fast,
While squirrels from our fiery beech
Were bearing off the mast.

You came, and look'd, and loved the view,
Long known and loved by me,
Green Sussex fading into blue
With one gray glimpse of sea.

Science had not to surrender to Tennyson—the poet was a humble slave of natural things. Yet it was this harmonious description of natural phenomena which made it possible for tens of thousands of minor poets to acquire the Tennysonian manner, and thus to make it well-nigh impossible for the major poets— the Brownings, the FitzGeralds, the Watsons and the Bridges, to come into their kingdom. He made mediocrity acceptable, so long as it is clothed in the fair raiment of mellifluous imagery . . .

That Tennyson had his ludicrous side—as have all poets, forsooth!—is best illustrated by the story of an incident that happened in Paris. Alfred and his brother Frederick were together in the capital of France, and Alfred's French was a negligible quantity. Frederick spoke it, moreover, with a distinctly Anglo-Saxon accent; so, coming down one morning before his brother, and wishing to go out at once for a walk, he called the waiter.

"Take care not to let the fire go out!" was to be his

admonition; but he translated literally, and instead of pronouncing " fire " as " feu " he pronounced it with the round " oo "— so that the waiter heard these words: *" Prenez garde de ne pas laisser sortir le fou!"*

Now, the wild appearence and the eccentric manners of England's Laureate had already aroused alarm in the establishment; and here appeared to be confirmation of the suspicion.—" Take care that you do not allow the lunatic to go out!"

When Alfred came downstairs, and wished to follow his brother Frederick for a " constitutional," the waiter planted his back against the door, and commenced a soothing message—words adapted to a weak intellect. Tennyson raged at the well-meaning servant, but his rising anger was taken to be proof positive of his madness. Other waiters were called, and the poet was not released until Frederick's return later in the morning . . .

We know that Tennyson's laugh was full and sonorous, and that he had a gift for the telling of humorous stories; but it is not probable that he was fond of the one just related,—for he was almost altogether unable to sink his sense of dignity. That spirit reveals itself a score of times with a noble seriousness in his greatest lyrics . . .

Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength which in old days
Moved earth and heaven; that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate, but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.

In spite of the enthusiasm with which I have just written of his faculties of observation and his self-respecting craftsmanship, it would be difficult to produce any important addition to English poetry—in the wide realm of Tennyson's output—that could not have been written, with higher or lower degree of skill, by any one of the other eight stars of our galaxy. He has not the "individual" note of either Shelley or Keats. There is intellectual force here: but how much does it not owe to the perfection of its form, and how much to the skill with which the thought is dropped within the mould?—

In the Spring a fuller crimson comes upon the
robin's breast;
In the Spring the wanton lapwing gets himself
another crest;—

rolling sonorously and yet methodically onward to its hackneyed conclusion about the effect of Spring upon a " young man's fancy."

Let us, howbeit, be fair to one in whom the music of poetry vibrated from earliest infancy. He should rank equal, at least, with Shelley and Keats, and considerably higher than Byron, in that he never once stumbled into uncouthness or vulgarity. The words " far, far away," he told his friends had a strange charm for him, even when a child in his nurse's arms; and before he could read he would spread his arms to the storm and cry, " I hear a voice that's speaking in the wind."

With uniform judgment this poet, fourth son of a clergyman, and brother of at least two other gifted versifiers, (Frederick and Charles), modelled everything that carried his signature as near to perfection as his splendid technique could command. Throughout the sixty years of his creative work he was true to his ideals.

Edition after edition of his works was published in the poet's lifetime; and he never ceased to refine and improve. He did more than justice to his gifts, and he reverenced his enviable position as Laureate of a great Realm. There is a magnetism in his ponder-

ings about Immortality (and this in spite of the parochial atmosphere of the greater part of *In Memoriam*,) which makes that great work immortal. He made clear the road to compromise between Darwin and the Church; and he must be counted as one of the sweetest-souled reconcilers of Dogma with Science:

Let knowledge grow from more to more,
But more of reverence in us dwell;
That mind and soul, according well,
May make one music as before,

But *vaster* . . .

The Tennysonian " somehow good " expectation of Man is being realized year by year as Science becomes more reverent, and as Religion grows more pliable. Wrought into the very structure of our life appears now to be the Victorian Poet's expectation of immortality,—

That nothing walks with aimless feet;
That not one life will be destroyed,
Or cast as rubbish to the void,
When God hath made the pile complete;

That not a worm is cloven in vain;
That not a moth with vain desire
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,
Or but subserves another's gain.

If Keats was the great "ought to be" of poetry, Tennyson was the "indubitably is." For, whatever the promise of his youth, he was capable of writing with the same force, the same intellect, the same perfection of form, in his old age as in the period of his hale maturity. Between *Oenone* and *Crossing the Bar* there is an unchanged affinity of artistic control over material: between—

There lies a vale in Ida, lovelier
Than all the valleys of Ionian hills.
The swimming vapour slopes athwart the glen,
Puts forth an arm, and creeps from pine to pine,
And loiters, slowly drawn.

—and what was almost an impromptu, written hastily, yet with what a sure precision and power:

Twilight and evening bell,
And after that the dark!

And may there be no sadness of farewell
When I embark.

Though Tennyson published much that was not equal to his best, he never once became wordy or tedious. The lover of poetry turns oftener to the shorter lyrics, (*qua* lyrics), of Tennyson that he does to those of Shelley or Keats; for they sing of themselves. The number of composers who have made settings of "Blow bugle, blow," and "Now Sleeps the Crimson Petal" is proof of Tennyson's high lyrical note. What musician would willingly sacrifice a verse like this:

O hark, O hear! how thin and clear,
And thinner, clearer, farther going!
O sweet and far from cliff and scar
The horns of Elfland faintly blowing!
Blow, let us hear the purple glens replying:
Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.

To-day, when we say "Tennysonian," we imply a wealth of imagery and a control of epithet scarcely to be found elsewhere from Chaucer to our own period. These were the secrets of his phenomenal success, and his maintained popularity. Because of Tennyson,

minor poetry is no longer so far removed from major, as to permit the great versifiers of our day to stand head and shoulders above their contemporaries. By reason of Tennyson, even the magazine poet is stimulated to be musical as well as intelligible.

Born at Somersby, in Lincolnshire, on the sixth of August, 1809, Alfred Tennyson died, full of years and honours, on the sixth of October, 1892. He was one of those few poets who receive their fullest meed of honour from their own generation, and it would be too much to say that it was not fairly won.

IX.

ROBERT BROWNING.

(1812 - 1889)

ROBERT BROWNING.
(1812 - 1889)

What a contrast in lyrical value is found when we turn from the mellifluous diction of Tennyson to the rugged lines of Robert Browning!

In the veins of this great contemporary of England's Laureate mingled Scottish, African and German blood. His ancestors had been associated with St. Kitts, and his best poems were written in France, Italy and Russia. Here is cosmopolitanism with a vengeance! We are told that he acquired North Italian movements and manners, by reason of his long sojourn in that country. And the same sort of involved gesticulation confronts us in his works—a tangle of vexed images, garbed in motley. It is as though speech had stumbled on the threshold of expression, and had found relief in violence!

Yet how great he was! How he exults, this stammering poet, when he achieves intelligibility; and when the scholar's erudition no longer mocks the poet's fancy.

He seems impelled to unexpected rhymes! The reader pauses in mingled astonishment and admiration.

Nay but you, who do not love her,
Is she not pure gold, my mistress?
Holds earth aught—speak truth!—above her?
Aught like this tress, see, and this tress,
And this last fairest tress of all,
So fair, see, ere I let it fall?

Because you spend your lives in praising;
To praise, you search the wide world over:
So, why not witness, calmly gazing,
If earth holds aught—speak truth—above her?
Above this tress, and this I touch
But cannot praise, I love so much!

The incalculable mating, here, of profundity of thought and delicate imagining!

Was it not because of Coleridge's obscurity—save in the few fragments best known to the public—that I almost excluded the name of so great a thinker from the Immortal Nine?

However ardent may be our delight in *The Ancient Mariner,* and in the frustrated fascination of *Kubla*

Khan, we are compelled to admit that the sum of Coleridge's muse is scarcely enough to satisfy our expectations. Even as of Browning, we may regret that his strength was so often baulked of expression by his leaning to the uncouth. To be a joy for ever, Poetry must be a thing of beauty. Carlyle had far, far too much influence over the class from which Browning sprang. The most gracious of Browning's fancies are marred by a Carlylian substitute for pure English.

Robert Browning was born on the seventh of May, 1812, of parents who were able to indulge his predilections toward an idle life. He browsed. His brain, as a result, was under-drilled, even while it became filled with out-of-the-way facts—facts which cropped up in his work, during later years, in the most disconcerting fashion.

Printed at the moment he came of age, Robert Browning's *Pauline* was apparelled in mystery: for it was issued anonymously. In measure and in strength it entitled him to a serious hearing; but the public remained cold. Russia and Italy then broadened the poet's outlook, and there came *Paracelsus.* This won for him, at least, the recognition of literary men, and led to the writing of *Strafford.* In the title-

rôle of this play Macready appeared—for five nights! Browning was not a success; but he was now to touch his lyre to the lyrical strain. By his lyrics his fame will be most readily kept alive.

How is this?—

> All that I know
> Of a certain star,
> Is, it can throw
> (Like the angled spar)
> Now a dart of red,
> Now a dart of blue,
> Till my friends have said
> They would fain see, too,
> My star that dartles the red and the blue!

Then it stops like a bird; like a flower, hangs furled:
They must solace themselves with the Saturn above it.
What matter to me if their star is a world?
Mine has opened its soul to me; therefore I love it!

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge had received thirty guineas for ballads and lyrics; and Keats had sold the copyright of *Endymion* for a hundred pounds. Moreover, Tennyson and his brothers had sold a book

for twenty pounds—half in cash and half in books. But Browning had to pay (and pay heavily!) for the issue of his books. He almost forced the public to listen to him . . .

Yet we need go no further than *Grow Old Along with Me* to discover the mood of extraordinary expansiveness which makes Browning the scholar's singer—

> Then, welcome each rebuff
> That turns earth's smoothness rough,
> Each sting that bids nor stand or sit, but go!
> Be our joy three-parts pain!
> Strive and hold cheap the strain;
> Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge
> the throe!

It is beyond serious controversy that Browning was the mental superior of Tennyson; and he was certainly the superior of Byron in dramatic power. He imaged an eternity of progress and fruition; and we owe to him a score of lyrics that wing the highest thoughts of love—

> You'll love me yet!—and I can tarry
> Your love's protracted growing:

June reared this bunch of flowers you carry,
From seeds of April sowing.

I plant a heartful now: some seed
At least is sure to strike,
And yield—what you'll not pluck indeed,
Not love, but, may-be like!

You'll look at least on love's remains,
A grave's one violet:
Your look?—that pays a thousand pains,
What's death?—you'll love me yet!

The lyrical note, nevertheless, in Browning is not suited to musical composers. The famous *Pippa* song is altogether unsingable,—the line

The hill-side's dew-pearled

being especially stiff and difficult of enunciation! Miss Helen Taylor's tender little lyric *I Pass'd by Your Window* (set to a simple melody by Madame May Brahe), lifts Browning's imagery to the concert-platform in a quite legitimate fashion—

. . . When the morning was red;
The dew on the rose-bud,
The lark overhead

taking the place of

. . . day's at the morn;
Morning's at seven;
The hill-side's dew-pearled;
The lark's on the wing;

It may be of interest briefly to recount the courtship of Robert Browning and Elizabeth Barrett. It was in the lady's best book of poems that *Bells and Pomegranates* (and Browning, their author), found:

. . . some pomegranate, which, if cut deep
down the middle,
Shows a heart within blood-tinctured of a veined
humanity.

We may dispute, if we will, whether Miss Barrett's couplet is " poetry "—but, considered as a compliment, from a woman who had succeeded, to a man who had but failed in the search for fame, it was distinctly

stimulating. In gratitude and homage Browning wrote Elizabeth a letter. Though he had never met the lady, he was bold enough to start off with the words, " I love your books, and—I love you too!"

In these " film " days it is rather a misnomer to say that the love of the two great Victorian poets was " romantic." We have to recall that conviction of beauty comes *at sight*—witness the words of Marlowe

> Is this the face that launched a thousand ships,
> And burned the topless towers of Ilium?

Love is indeed a matter of " the moment and the place together "—and the love of Robert for Elizabeth came more from the head than from the heart . . . Still, they had their glamorous elopement, (because of an obdurate father's determination to keep them apart). Elizabeth returned from the Church on that September morning in 1846, exactly as though nothing had happened. A week later, however, husband and wife fled to Paris. The father was of an unforgiving nature. Never again would he open his errant daughter's letters; and even the arrival of a grandson left him unreconciled . . .

There were no money-troubles, none the less, for

Elizabeth had a fortune of her own. Ten years after the marriage John Kenyon, a cousin of the bride, left the two poets eleven thousand pounds. So Browning was able to pay an ardent suit to both his muse and his mistress; and from this material point of view there is romance and to spare in the lives of two such gifted singers . . .

In essence, Robert belongs to that same "later Victorian" period which placed its hall-mark on Tennyson; but there must be established a subtle and notable difference. There came about a psychological, analytic, probing difference of result, giving Tennyson a garb of mellifluousness, and to Browning daring metrical garments that do not always fit . . .

Who among us has not delighted in the whimsical rhymes of *The Pied Piper of Hamelin,—silence* coupled with *mile hence; vermin* made to pair with *ermine;* and *counsel* rhymed with *gown sell?*

Yet, behind all this posturing lay a rare genius, a keen and broad and sane outlook on life, a thoroughly masculine philosophy, beside which Tennyson's note sounds almost effeminate,—and a tremendous creative power. Melody, grace, and the artistic precision which seeks until it finds the "inevitable epithet" there was not; although Browning could write entirely musical

verse when he deigned to polish and refine.

For sustained artistry would it not be hard to beat *The Patriot,* where there is no trace whatever of those queer vocables that elsewhere provoke our smiles?—

> It was roses, roses, all the way,
> With myrtle mixed in my path like mad:
> The house-roofs seemed to heave and sway,
> The church-spires flamed, such flags they had,
> A year ago on this very day!
>
> The air broke into a mist with bells,
> The old walls rocked with the crowd and cries.

A new sense of artistry of this nature made the public by degrees aware that a real singer was waiting for an audience. For who could deny the poetic inspiration—inspiration of the highest quality—that had power so to disintegrate the senses as to convince us by a phrase like "a mist with bells:" the use of sight in place of hearing in a manner that was almost without parallel in current literature? Browning's method was both original and convincing, whereas the Sitwells of our own period merely serves to amuse. One may not "see" with the ears, or "feel" with the eyes!

The dismal ending of that poem by Browning is strangely moving—

I go in the rain, and, more than needs,
A rope cuts both my wrists behind;
And I think, by the feel, my forehead bleeds,
For they fling, whoever has a mind,
Stones at me for my year's misdeeds.

Thus I entered, and thus I go . . .

Throughout his life all that Browning had to say of note he said in verse. If he had possessed the complete poetic soul, we should not have needed a Browning Society to interpret his cryptograms. None the less, he is not obscure after patient perusal; and he must stand high among our Nine Immortals. It was his own queer lack of a musical ear that led to so many infelicities. That "beauty-deafness," however, no more deprives him of royal rank than Beethoven's deafness prevented him from composing his glorious symphonies. Robert Browning got *inside*; and he expresed the very thoughts that his poetic characters must inevitably have had.

He died in Venice, nearly thirty years after he had

lost his wife. On the thirty-first day of December, 1889, the poet found his niche in Westminster Abbey.

Even Tennyson had to concede that his contemporary was a "great thinker in verse." The Laureate's infallible demand for harmonious rhythm was almost consistently denied by the creator of *The Ring and the Book*. Yet English poetry has received Browning's hall-mark; and it has been made nobler for ever by that pregnant touch!

CONCLUSION.

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My task is ended. I have handled in an unpretentious manner the work of the nine poets whom I regard as most typical of the Nineteenth Century. They are singers whose work should be treasured, memorized, absorbed—besides being "read" and "known"—by every English-speaking man and woman of our time.

Into the lethargy of an effete idealism these singers brought, each in his own way, a glow of revivifying earnestness and sincerity. The unconscious labour of the poet is the conscious creation of God. Poetry and religion are hence synonymous terms. One cannot exist without the other: the poet is God's priest.

These are honoured and glorious names: Shelley, Wordsworth, Byron, Keats, Coleridge, Swinburne, Tennyson, Browning, and Scott; and in their golden-tongued company we may feel how heaving thought has ebbed and flowed, until it has flooded the soul of the singer with

> The light that never was on sea or land,
> The consecration and the poet's dream!

It is largely due to the life-work of these Immortals that poetry is still a living force among us. Their influence has extended into channels which, (however divergent from the source), yet owe to inspiration their very existence. There is not a living rhymer, no matter how much he may appear to be in revolt against the past, who has not drunk at their clear waters!

Simple admiration is the truest wisdom. Reverence is the root of understanding. So, in seeking to grasp more than is possible to our spiritual growth, we enjoy only the more what is already within our reach.

From the poet's " fine careless rapture " springs the heart's and mind's " eternal summer " of happiness and peace.

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Stuart-Young, John Moray
The immortal nine.

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